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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

COMPOSING LIVES:
WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION, WOMEN IN CONVERSATION

BY

LINDA INA INGLIS

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1994

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Linda I. Inglis

10538 - 132 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
CANADA
T5N 1Z5

April 14, 1994
Date

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Composing Lives: Women in Administration, Women in Conversation submitted by Linda I. Inglis, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

D. J. Clandinin, Supervisor

R. McKay

B. Young

December 16, 1993
Date

DEDICATION

To my husband Colin

and

children Aidan and Calaine

for all their love and support

as we compose our family story.

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COMPOSING LIVES:

WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION, WOMEN IN CONVERSATION

ABSTRACT

In this narrative inquiry five women in school administration share through conversation, stories about their professional and personal lives. The research describes how these women acquire a greater understanding of their experiences by sharing them and engaging in the reflective process. Narrative inquiry (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) provides the framework for identifying themes within their conversations and illustrating how personal practical knowledge can be used to make meaning of the past and create purpose in the future. The role of the participant observer is re-conceptualized through the choice of using letters as the writing genre for the thesis. By writing letters to these women, returning their stories to them, the essence of narrative inquiry is touched, for it is as we create and share our narratives that we are ourselves being created.

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NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS

The Seeds of My Search

I can still picture myself that first morning early in August walking to my school, the school where I was now the principal. It was going to be a warm day but the dew on the grass was still there as I walked across the school yard. My feelings as I approached the school were charged with emotion. Great anticipation swelled up within me. I could hardly wait to be back in a school. Seven years of my teaching career had been working as a consultant. I longed to be back in a school.

The walk through the school field was long. I passed the playground, still quiet early in the morning. Soon I would meet the children who had played the summer away at this park. I could hardly wait for the beginning of school. I saw it as a chance to help shape a community of children and adults, a community which was warm, welcoming, stimulating and challenging, a learning environment.

I knew I held many strong beliefs and ideas about children and learning. I wondered how they would fare in the school. What beliefs guided present practices in the school? Along with the anticipation, I also felt anxiety. It got my adrenalin pumping even more. I was finally at the back doors, doors designated separately for the girls and the boys. I made a note to contact maintenance for sign removal. I wondered, "Did they really line up boys in one line, girls in another?" There was a lot I did not know about my school.

The school was quiet, almost ready for opening. Half of the long school-length hallway was cleaned, polished and shone brilliantly. The other half still held the footprints, scuffs and tracks of the past year. I wondered about the children who had left their marks on that hallway. I wondered about the stories they would tell of their journeys through the hall in the new year.

Boisterous singing abruptly curtailed my wondering. It was the custodian who was working with great gusto to have the school in shape for day one. Although he had a lot to do, he knew that today was a beginning for him and so he told me many stories about the school, the children, the parents, the staff. Through his stories he told me of himself. He took great pride in his work and believed he helped parents and children feel good about the school by keeping it clean. If children didn't take care of the school and respect it, then "You gotta make 'em have respect". We took a tour of the school so he could show me how well it had been maintained. "No tape on these walls to ruin the paint." I wondered, "Did that mean no displaying of children's art and writing?" He showed me a pile of work orders on my desk to be signed. All of them were completed and signed by his name and title HEAD CUSTODIAN. He also told me he loved playing floor hockey with the children - and that it was a pretty good school too.

Over the next few days as I sorted through paper work, I kept a close "window watch" on the walk leading up to the school. My intention was to greet people - welcome them. When I missed seeing them, I used the "custodian's cue",

that is his loud call out to staff, parents and children. He did a wonderful job on promoting the school, always telling parents new to the school how good the school was. He gave me and others opportunities for a good beginning.

Teachers started to come back to get ready and many conversations gave glimpses of stories yet to be lived and told. Many of our conversations were framed within questions about what I would do regarding such things as children coming early to school or coming back in to the school during recess. I wonder now about the staff's expectations of me and about the power they associated with the position of principal. I wanted their questions to be the beginnings of opportunities for everyone to share their beliefs and feelings about children, about learning, and about who "makes policy".

"Hey are you the new principal? I've never had a girl principal." After meeting a few of the boys the word seemed to spread that the new "girl" principal was in the school. I remember two young children trying to peek in the window looking for the girl principal and one of them saying "it's not a girl - she's a lady principal". It was my chance to meet a lot of curious children. They too could hardly wait for the year to begin. Beginnings always offer hope. I wondered about the children's hopes. What were they? Would they be fulfilled?

I knew I was expected to be the leader, the one who is ultimately responsible for everything. I also knew I was to be part of a team including staff, students, parents and the community at large. In some instances, I knew I could share and talk

about beliefs and actions. In other situations, I knew I had to go it alone. I wondered about the possibility for schools to change and to become learning communities with shared leadership. Could this even be considered a possibility? Could the principal be more of an equal team member? Or do the responsibilities and requirements of the job necessitate a distancing of the principal from staff?

I wondered about the changes I would be part of, how they would come about in the upcoming year. How would I create and shape? How would I be influenced and shaped? What would the beginnings bring? What school stories had begun?

Reflection on Those First Days: Searching My Story

My memory of my "walk to school" is vivid. It was a change in my life which was very important and meaningful to me. It was not that I had a "new job" or "a promotion" - it was that I now had an opportunity to be part of a school community again. I was looking forward to being part of a community of staff, students and parents who would work together to make "our school" a good school for children. I knew this may not be a typical reaction when one is appointed a principal. I knew this from personal experience. On the day administrative appointments were announced a colleague shook my hand and congratulated me on my appointment. He added that I shouldn't worry that it was to a small school, because "you'll get a large one someday". Size was not an issue for me. I had

applied for the school because it was a size I like. Bigness and prestige were not critical factors for me.

I remember thinking I wanted this school to be a school to which I would send my children. I wondered about what the school was like. What were the teachers feeling about school as they prepared for school opening? Were their feelings like mine? Were they excited? Were they looking forward to the school year? Were they getting ready for the long haul, counting the number of days until long weekends and holidays? I wondered too about the students. Would their initial eagerness last? Would their eagerness be nurtured and transformed into a genuine interest in their school learning? Would they slip into a routine where the reward was the end of the day or the holidays? What were parents anticipating as they readied their children for school? What concerns and fears were they harbouring? Were they hoping for a better year for their children? Were they hoping the school would know and meet their child's needs?

I had been out to the school several times after I had been "appointed" and before that August walk to school. My first trip was in June in order to meet staff informally and to introduce myself. I wanted them to know how much I was looking forward to coming to the school, to getting to know them and to working with them. I even took a small bouquet of fresh cut daisies for the staff room table. The attached card read "Have a Great Summer!". My other two visits were to meet with the

present principal to talk about the school. We did the school tour. We looked at the school plan, budget, and files and familiarized me with the filing system.

I reviewed staff performance appraisal files. The checklists did not present me with a lot of information. I asked the principal to tell me about the school and his response was "What would you like to know?". I really didn't exactly know. I wanted to hear the school story, how he knew it. There was probably so much he could tell me but our meeting time was near its end. What could he really say? What would he choose to share?

Though we knew each other professionally we had established a collegial relationship which reduced the "risk factors" in sharing one's school story. Sharing the school story did not occur for many reasons. It seemed that the change of administration was portrayed as the transfer of power. For him it was the end of a term, for me, the beginning. I wondered about the connection between those phases. He was concerned with putting closure on his job. I was concerned with opening mine. The official story had been shared, but what of the story of everyday life in the school? What did I need to know so I could care for the school? Neither time nor the place was found for him to share what he had been so much a part of. Perhaps he wanted me and those in the school to have a fresh start. He may not have wanted to relive by retelling. I did not know. I did not ask all the questions I should have. I did not know all the questions. A school story was not shared. I believe we

both missed an opportunity to help each other through sharing our personal stories and the school story.

During those first days in August as I went through the stacks of mail, read and signed work orders, I kept thinking that I really did not know the school. I had read the documents describing the school: its "Plan for Learning", its budget, the survey results and the achievement test results. But these documents were not the school story. I knew very little about who the people in the story were. Who were the characters? What were the plots? What stories were lived and told?

I was more concerned with the voices I had not heard from yet, students, staff and parents. What story would they share about the school? They, too, were probably wondering what would happen now with a new principal. I needed to find out about the school. How could I start to hear the school stories? Each time I heard the custodian holler out a greeting to a parent or teacher, I dropped my papers and went to extend my welcome. I intended to reach out to people, going on to more middle ground rather than meeting them in the "Office". When I saw children peeping in or letting their curiosity support their courage enough to come into the school, I took that opportunity to call out a greeting, introduce myself and ask their names. I was getting a quick glimpse into some of the school stories. New families to the school provided me a wonderful opportunity to share my story about the school (sprinkled heavily with my beliefs about children and learning) and to hear their

expectations of the school first hand. At these times I began to get a sense of being part of the community, of co-creating a school story with them.

When I met families already in the school, I became a very attentive listener. I listened to what they were sharing in their stories and wondered what they were not sharing because I was new, an unknown, and also because I was the principal. I made note of what they shared in terms of what they liked about the school and what they hoped would remain the same, such as morning kindergarten classes and lunch hour times. They also gave me good indications of their concerns through questions such as: Will you have a music teacher?; Will the school get more computers?; Will you still have split grades?.

Conversations with staff those first few days provided me with more stories of the school, new stories as well as stories I had heard from others but changed because they were now spoken by a different story teller. Often in our conversations I detected the existence of many individual stories without common threads weaving into a school story. In essence, the school story was composed of separate stories, stories of separateness. It felt like a book of short stories without a connecting theme linking them together. The strength of the stories was silenced by this separation.

I experienced a sense and an expectation from many that I too was supposed to, indeed would, go about my work constructing another separate story. That was the role of an administrator! It seemed that I could become the keeper of stories, creating more of the secret or privileged knowledge within schools. I would have

been living out my job in a manner that I would not be comfortable with, one that I could not tolerate personally. It was not the beginning of how I believed a caring community could or should be nurtured.

I wondered about the kind of community that would be created where the principal was the "keeper of stories", where stories are not shared among the many story tellers and story livers. I know that some stories were shared in the trust that I would not share them with others. Other stories, however, were not confidential. If they could be shared with others, the school story would be enriched. Through sharing our stories, birth would be given to a collaborative story.

My first days at school gave me much to reflect on. I still remember many times at the day's end - when all was quiet and I sat alone at my round table - thinking about how I could become a part of the community. How could I begin to encourage people to share their stories? How could we collaborate to construct and create a school story? I kept coming back to the only possible way I saw to do this. That was to start sharing my stories and inviting others to share theirs. I needed to discover when, how and where to do it.

Reflections on Administration: Searching Within The Role

What does it mean to be a school principal? What did I believe I would be doing? How did I envision myself as a school leader? How many different

expectations existed regarding how I would carry out my work? Which expectations would come to bear the heaviest on shaping what kind of principal, what kind of school leader, I would be?

I read about my role "on paper" by referring to the "Role and Responsibility" statement of my district. I found amusing the dictionary definitions of administer, administrator and administration. Each one of them referred to the power vested within the act or persons and of "doing to" others. The definition of principal did not cast the position in a more favourable light either for it spoke of the hierarchy, of authority, of importance and of superiority of the person. I questioned whether the terms "school administrator" or "school principal" accurately reflected what I believed I would be doing and what I believed I should be doing. I did not see a close relationship between these definitions and my definitions. I wondered, though, about the expectations of others. Were the expectations of others defined by the definitions I had read? Those thoughts led me to think even more about just what it was a school leader could and should do in a school. I realized as I searched for the "shoulds" that I saw my work as an administrator as moral work. Nel Noddings (1986) draws attention to teaching as being moral work, that an ethic of caring should prevail. I believed that my job as an administrator was to show caring in my words and my actions. Noddings suggests that "natural caring establishes the ideal for ethical caring, and ethical caring imitates this ideal in its efforts to institute, maintain and reestablish natural caring" (p. 407). The moral work that I saw my job as being

could only be done in a caring community and I needed to concern myself with the fostering of one.

Perhaps for some school administrators, there was comfort with the definitions and with the role and responsibility statements. Because these definitions did not fit for me, I wondered if other of my colleagues would see their work defined in those terms. I believed many of them wanted to re-define the work of "school principal" so that it not only reflected the actual work but what it could and should be, that is, a chance for the definition to come out of the life experiences of the job.

The feelings I or my colleagues had about the accuracy of the definitions and the descriptors was not the main issue in this research. I wanted to explore how school principals engaged in reflection on their work in schools and to acquire a greater understanding of their experiences and, through this process, to engage in changed practices based on their reconstructed knowledge. How could principals become reflective practitioners in order to transform their practices? What places and opportunities were there for principals to be "reflective practitioners"?

For myself as a principal, I felt I had to come to know and to understand my practices if I was to respond to critics and outside agencies who were exercising their influence and power in shaping schools. I felt I needed an opportunity to reflect on just what it was that I did. I needed an opportunity to question my beliefs and my actions and to make changes. I knew other colleagues in administration who shared my sense of this. It always seemed that during meeting breaks or after meetings,

small clusters of principals would congregate. They would express frustrations with their jobs but they would not get around to how they could deal with those frustrations. They would go home carrying the same frustrations. I felt if spaces for this reflection were not available to us, our response to the demands for reform would result in a "reflex reaction" rather than a "reflective response". This was the context for my research. I began to look for reflective spaces.

Such spaces would enable groups of school principals to gather to share their experiences, particularly experiences that affected them greatly, the ones that involved a risk in telling. Spaces for such reflection are rare. They may not even exist. However, I wondered, without such reflection, could I really carry out the work of a school principal? How could I engage with my administrator colleagues in situations to enable a more growth-oriented, reflective practice approach for principals, an approach which is responsive and moral in nature?

I thought about why I valued reflecting with colleagues. Reflecting on my work provides an opportunity for me to understand myself in a different way, from a new perspective. Reflecting with colleagues in safe places that encourage sharing "risky" stories has even more possibility. If I reflect, share my reflections and receive a response which leads to further reflection, the result is an increased understanding of my experience. My experience, my tacit knowledge, takes on a tangible form. I have come to know my personal knowledge. Polanyi refers to this process as "the personal participation of the knower in all acts of understanding"

(1959, p. 26). So it is that by being engaged in the process of coming to knowledge through reflecting and receiving responses to my reflections, I became aware of and had the possibility of reconstructing my personal knowledge.

Though this knowledge has been created personally, it is not to be solely regarded as subjective. Polanyi (1958) addresses the participation of the person in their knowledge and understanding and states,

> Comprehension is neither an arbitrary act nor a passive experience, but a responsible act claiming universal validity. Such knowledge is indeed objective in the sense of establishing contact with a hidden reality; a contact that is defined as the condition for anticipating an indeterminate range of yet unknown (and perhaps yet inconceivable) true implications. It seems reasonable to describe this fusion of the personal and the objective as Personal Knowledge (p. vii).

This construction and reconstruction of my personal knowledge creates the possibility to discover different pathways, connections and opportunities I can consciously choose to pursue. A "potpourri of possibilities" is presented for my consideration and actions with respect to how I can "live" my work in school. I can look at situations and strive for a responsiveness in my actions which demonstrates a caring approach, attention being given to the moral aspects. I can gain a greater understanding of myself as a school principal, as an educator. The strength inherent in my understanding my knowing, basing my actions in it, is that I can have my thoughts and actions acting in concert. It presents a holistic perspective. What Polanyi calls personal knowledge has been brought together with an understanding of practical

knowledge by Connelly and Clandinin, "personal practical knowledge is a moral, affective and aesthetic way of knowing life's educational situations (1988, p. 59).

Their statement, summarizes for me, why awareness of my personal practical knowledge is critical. It addresses the necessity for me to make my job whole and to keep it whole. If I do not come to know and understand my educational situations, all their complexities, from each perspective, then I will not be able to realize all that my job can be. My job could become fragmented, leaving pieces of complexities seemingly destined to remain disjointed, to be managed and manipulated. My personal practical knowledge, my awareness of it is the very essence of my work. It is critical that I acknowledge it, name it, and be reflective about it. It follows, for me, that the more I become aware of my personal practical knowledge, the more fulfilling I will find my work. It is through reflection with others that I have come to know what I know, at least some of what I know. When I have been engaged in reflective practice with colleagues, I have found the experience to be both exhausting and invigorating at the same time. I persevere and continue because of the different pathways and new possibilities I discover in my work through our conversations.

Alternative pathways are not always welcomed or deemed appropriate within organizations that have already pre-determined and defined the administrative role, and how it shall be "performed". Some organizational structures are not open to reflection on, and redefining of, the work of principals. What was once presented as a proposed role for principals has become "the" role even though the work has

changed. The rhythm or routine of the initial "role description" lulls those who have defined the role and those who carry it out into complacency, even though there is disharmony between the definition and the work actually done. A tension is created and often results in the silencing of our personal practical knowledge as not being valid knowledge which should be heard. Much is lost when this silencing occurs. Personal practical knowledge is the knowledge that, when shared, assists one in making those "hard decisions" by presenting more choices to draw from. This knowledge is also often the seed from which change will begin. I believe it is also the knowledge that brings together the "knowing how" and the "doing" in the creation of caring communities.

I and, I believe, some of my colleagues, question aspects of the prescribed role for school principals. Though I question some of the expectations and directions given to school principals, they sometimes offer an easy way out of difficult or awkward situations for one can say "that's just the way it is, we've been asked to do this". By adopting this stance, "carrying out the orders", one denies the moral, the responsive elements, and relinquishes personal responsibility and caring by turning to "the book". Momentary relief from having to make a personal decision for action (though a different course of action would possibly better meet the needs of the school) and to follow a district course of action is followed, for me, by increased stress created by the dissonance between my personal beliefs and the action I have to carry out.

I believe there are other school principals, like me, who want opportunities to reflect with colleagues about their work in administration. We want to know what our colleagues are doing in their schools, to hear about other ways of creating school climates and communities and to imagine other possibilities.

As a school principal I have school stories to share. I believe that it is through the sharing of my stories that I will be able to question and challenge myself as an educator. Connelly and Clandinin share that "humans make meaning of experiences by endlessly telling and retelling stories that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future" (1988, p. 24). Through engaging in this process, I envision and am able to create possibilities for better schools. If I do not create the spaces and opportunities for reflection and change to occur, then I run the risk of becoming accustomed to and a part of the status quo. If I see that the act of reflection through sharing my school stories with others is seen as a threat or disloyalty and therefore avoid it, choosing silence, then I create an insular state for myself. I am concerned I would lose connection with my school, the people in it and with society. The greatest risk I run is the isolation of myself from others and ultimately from myself if my school stories are silenced. Belenky et al describe extensively how women relate to their life experiences in terms of their "voice", its presence, its silence or the silencing of it (1986).

I hear the demands for school reform from many places in society. If, as a school principal, I am to be a school leader, then I need a place and a way to develop

a new understanding of my work and my place in the school context. A school district could benefit greatly by encouraging principals, like myself, to be reflective practitioners.

Firstly, it is healthy for school districts to stop and look at themselves through different lenses, questioning and challenging what is happening. If a district sent a message to all of us as principals that indicated our voices were important and should be heard, perhaps a sense of community could be established among them. Secondly, if principals experience being part of a community where their voices are invited to be heard, they then in turn could help create such climates in their schools for staff and for students. Lastly, the personal well being of principals might be paid attention to. Perhaps the scenario of being a "Lone Reflective Practitioner" would occur less, and supportive groups would grow through the sharing of stories. It is through coming together in reflective communities that there is the possibility for transforming our schools.

The creation of reflective communities for principals would possibly secure educators a strong voice in influencing the reformation of schools and of education systems. Supportive communities would provide principals the opportunity to know, understand, and even determine how and what one does as a principal. The sharing of our school stories as administrators provides principals with the beginnings of new stories through the retelling of old.

Reflection - A Basic Need for Me:
Personal Searching

I reflect a lot. I constantly find myself thinking about how I might have done something differently or how I can prepare to actually "do it" differently next time. When I reflect I am not just thinking about things casually and then placing my thoughts on the shelf. My reflections are my struggles to make meaning and to understand myself and my experiences.

My reflections are about many things, about being a mother, about raising my children, about how to be part of creating a caring, supportive family. I struggle with similar questions as a teacher and principal. How does one raise children within a school? How can I work with others to create a school community? What is a school community? What is its nature? My reflections are not whimsical or light, they are intense and seem to demand that I take action. They connect my home life and work life, my personal knowledge and my professional knowledge. My experiences seem to beckon me to reflect on them, to re-experience them in order to understand them. The reflective process is often fragmented for me. Time is usually the reason. I snatch a moment to think about an incident or something happens which sparks a memory and a connection is made. Possibly some understanding is reached. The time is too short and it is often done alone. I find that the reflective process usually centres around unfinished business, or seemingly incomplete experiences. The situations are often about things that come to me shaped as dilemmas, the ones I want to rethink and to understand.

In recalling experiences, I find they are in no way any less real or removed than the original experience. In fact, in reflecting on them they are more intensified and

complex. I see more and feel more of the experience, whether it be the pain or pleasure within it.

The question I have asked so often of myself is "Does anyone else feel like this?". I know the answer. Of course, others feel this way. But who are they? How do I make myself known to them? How do we make connections with each other, separated as we are in different classrooms, different schools? It seems to happen so easily and naturally when I am talking about my children with other parents. It just seems to happen, the sharing about what a child has done, how I, as a parent, have responded. Many ideas and ways of handling and coping with life from how to get children to eat their "veggies" to keeping communication lines open and working in a family were offered. In such conversations, my reflections and questions had a community to receive them and respond to them. The risk was minimal, everyone had a similar experience or story. I felt the shared text with others. The strength of the community lay in its shared sense of problem, concern, its absence of visible structure. I could enter and exit easily, as my concerns surfaced and were responded to. The essence of the group was the connections made through talk. All voices were heard. I came away with many ideas, possibilities and approaches to help me understand what I was doing. I was provided with choices to see what might work in my particular situation.

In my work as a teacher, I remember having the same sense of community. More often than not it was outside of the school setting, among teachers who had come together for the purpose of sharing and talking about their teaching. The opportunities for such gatherings to occur within school itself were more difficult, largely due to schedules, physical space for gathering (our classrooms often kept us isolated), and when

we did meet there was "school" business to attend to. An experience when an entire staff did gather and form a community where sharing occurred and people felt safe in doing so is fondly referred to by many of us as a "magic year".

Now, as a school principal, I find I have more to reflect on and even more of a sense of needing a community to respond to my reflections. I find myself thinking about the community of mothers and how we shared with each other and of my experiences in teacher groups and the "magic year" in that one school. As a principal I want such groups to exist within the school among the whole staff. As a principal I would also like to have such groups exist for principals. I find myself reflecting on what it is I am trying to do, about my knowledge of schools. I can call on my close colleagues for "quick consultation" and they call me, or we catch each other just before or after a meeting.

We seem to have the chance only to respond to a situation but not to reflect on situations and to respond to shared reflections. I feel a tremendous responsibility to the children, staff and parents as principal of their school. I am passionate about making a school an educative (Dewey, 1938) place for all the students and their teachers and parents. If students have positive experiences and learn to live and tell their stories in more educated ways about themselves and their school experiences, I believe teachers and parents will also have positive feelings about the school. Being a mother has served only to intensify my passion for creating such schools for children. I know I have not always succeeded in doing so and I have struggled with why I have not. I ask myself many questions about what I believe I am hoping to help create - what the district I work in believes and is striving to create. I need to ask myself challenging questions about my

place as a principal in a school and how my story is lived out. I need to reflect and respond to the transformations in my knowledge brought about through reflection.

I question if this can really take place on an individual basis. I wonder if it should remain as an individual activity. What could be realized if there were communities of principals meeting and reflecting on their work, their knowledge, their relationships and the schools they work in? I believe my strong desire to reflect is so I can better understand what schools are and what they could be. To do to this my reflections must challenge my present beliefs and the present state and organization of schools.

NARRATIVE INQUIRY

The Search and the Research

I did not just decide one day that I was going to do narrative research. In fact, I regarded narrative as literature, something for leisure time reading. Grumet (1987, p. 320) shares "...Before I began to think of narratives as forms for educational research and criticism, I thought of them as literature...now I see narratives as a resymbolization of experience". She talks about narrative as providing a form for knowledge about feelings. Through the experience of writing narrative in a graduate course, I began to see it as a "way in" for me to reflect on and gain understanding of my personal practical knowledge.

Narrative provided me the opportunity to view my experiences and myself over time, to see connections and reasons for my actions and beliefs. I could make better sense of the unfolding of my life, tracing back brought into focus my life-events, the sequence and connections between them. Gergen and Gergen (1984) state that narrative provides an individual with a way to understand life-events as being systematically related and not simply "one damned thing after another" (p. 174). I do not know if I am comfortable with the notion of having life-events viewed as being systematically related, as the complexity of my life sometimes seems to defy the very idea of being systematic! Yet, I do feel the idea of connection is critical in understanding life-events. "Creations of narrative order may be essential in giving life a sense of meaning and direction (Bettleheim, 1976, p. 174). The order for me is found in the making of connections, seeing all the links that exist. In re-reading my narrative accounts written in the course, I gained insights, but greater insights were gained when I shared "my story" and received "response". The response was sometimes written or spoken with a nod and an "uh-uh" but very often, in fact, most of the

time, response was the receiving of another narrative, a connection made with another person's "story". A story heard, a story told. The connections seemed endless sometimes. I began to see how my story was part of another's story - how stories though they are individually told, are collectively constructed. My stories tell of my experiences with other people, my interactions with them in a variety of contexts. Without "the others" in my story, do I have a story? Does anyone? Gergen and Gergen contend that narratives are preeminently communal products...the byproducts of social interchange. They state that "one's "life-story" is thus not truly one's own, but a social property" (1984, p. 174). I see my life-story as being my own. When I tell it or write it, it is mine. Even though others co-author by being in the life-event that the story is about, I tell the story. However, without having them participate or interact with me, I would not have a story to tell. Others are characters in the stories I tell. They also tell a story about my life in which I am a character but that is their story, not mine. Shared contexts and similar experiences do not produce the same story from those involved. Indeed, it is critical that we not only recognize this but ask ourselves, how are the stories different and why are they so? The key concept for me here is the importance of the response to a story shared through the hearing of other stories and how understanding is arrived at through this process of sharing and responding. We need each other to create our stories and we need each other to respond to our stories so we can more fully understand our lives and our personal practical knowledge. Thus, to understand my life-experiences as a school principal, I need to share my stories with colleagues and have them do the same. The sharing of personal narratives and the social interchange is essential to my construction and reconstruction of my personal practical knowledge.

I had thought I could interview colleagues and, by listening to them share accounts of their experiences, I would gain insights into mine. However, I kept recalling how much it meant when I received a response to a story shared and how much I wanted to share my stories. Oakley's (1981, p. 49) phrase "no intimacy without reciprocity" made me rule out interviewing. I really wanted to hear their stories, and if I was the interviewer who posed questions even in unstructured interviews, I wondered if I would really hear them if I did not share. Conversation would let them decide when to share, how to say what they needed to say. Conversation would enable them to negotiate and to decide when to risk telling. Any framing on my part could lead to the imposing of my agenda. They would frame their story in my terms, in my structure rather than theirs. I wanted them to trust me so I needed to show trust by risking and sharing my story. I needed to be participant-observer.

> These resonances between the personal and the professional are the source of both insight and error. You avoid mistakes and distortions not so much by trying to build a wall between the observer and the observed as by observing the observer - observing yourself - as well, and bringing the personal issues into consciousness. (Bateson, 1984, p. 161)

My desire to be personally involved by sharing my story was echoed by the colleagues I asked to be part of my research. Each one expressed enthusiastic interest and indicated immediately that they wanted to be part of the group. In their response to my invitation I sensed a feeling of relief from the women that they could hardly wait to share their experiences, that each one was feeling a need to do so. One woman stated "I'm so glad you're doing this, thanks for inviting me". (Notes to file, September 8 to 10, 1992)

The invitation to construct and share our narratives is the conceptual framework for my research. We had the opportunity to listen and respond to one another, to hear

our own stories (perhaps for the first time) and to gain insight into our stories by sharing them and receiving them back from each other.

Sharing narrative "returns a story to the teller that is hers and not hers" (Grumet, 1987, p. 323)). This reciprocity provided an opportunity for each one of us to make explicit our personal practical knowledge and to enrich it by learning about each other's personal practical knowledge. Participant privilege is respect for each woman to share her story when and how she chose. The research provided a community for voices, which may have been silent or spoken but not heard, to be heard and recognized.

Awakening

My story, or rather the connections between my stories, began without my total awareness. I recall not paying a lot of attention to thinking about the reasons behind some of my colleagues' actions as we sat in meetings together. I was, perhaps, too busy planning and understanding my actions back at my school. I was still thinking about the stories being lived just within my school. Though I had thought about the job of a principal, questioned how I understood it in relationship to other definitions - beliefs of the role, I had done so in isolation. I had stayed within my own story. I began to think back to those meetings with my colleagues in relationship to my school story. I was wondering about the connections between the feelings I had experienced walking to my school that summer day, the stories that were told in those first few days, and throughout the year and how it fit with what I and my colleagues spoke about in our meetings together. My questions began rather like the sensation one has when, though the sun is shining brightly, you think you have felt a raindrop fall on your cheek. Often no note is

taken of this one drop, nor of the few that may follow, because the light from the sun is so strong or, as in my situation, I was too busy with my own job.

But those first few drops were the beginning of my study. The raindrops were my questions, the questions were my awakening (Connelly and Clandinin, 1991) as I begin to reflect on the times spent with colleagues in meetings. My thoughts centred around our conversations, who spoke, what was said, who listened. In conversation there is "an informal exchange of ideas by spoken words" (Oxford English Dictionary) but what of the substance of our words, the meaning intended or desired to be given going beyond the mere exchanging of ideas. Our conversations were often carried out like transactions, reporting, getting the business done. I found myself trying to understand why we did what we did as we sat in small groups or around large tables. What was being said in our conversations through both our words and actions? Questions I asked myself were, "How can s/he be so sure that is what should be done?" "Is it really so straightforward?" "Why does s/he see it that way? What happens at his/her school?"

Sometimes my questions dealt with the absence of questions both from me and from my colleagues when no discussion arose from agenda items. At these times I questioned "Shouldn't we talk about this further, perhaps there are other ways?". I asked of myself, "Am I the only one who has a question?"

I also asked questions of myself as I thought about how the day had gone at school. I wondered about the children and their parents, about how school was being experienced by them, about the teachers and how they were feeling about school and teaching. I had many silent conversations with myself, tossing around ideas about my job at the school. How I was a part of the school community? What I could contribute to

the community? I was concerned with the effect I had on the experiences of students and staff because of my participation in our school community, that is because of my leadership. I thought about how to share my silent conversations.

My increasing questioning was, for me, the impetus to take action, much like the realization that I had to take actions when those few drops from a sunny sky transform themselves into a soaking rain. My questions were my raindrops, my awakening to the necessity of sharing my silent conversations and questions about leadership within a school community.

I believed that I was not alone in having questions about how one lives the life of a school principal. The same clouds from which came my rain of questions were also present in the eyes of my colleagues. They, too, had questions. Here was the beginning of my study, my story.

My first awakening was the realization that I had many questions about principalship and the notion of leadership, that were worthy of inquiry. To allow for the inquiry and to afford myself a greater understanding of why I had questions and possible responses to them, I needed to engage in conversations with colleagues. I needed a community for inquiry. I decided to extend an invitation to colleagues to be part of such a community. Besides my personal reasons for the establishment of a group I hoped that we all would have the opportunity to talk about our lives as school principals, to share our stories of dilemmas, problems, joys, celebrations, and to ask questions of these stories that would lead to new stories. I envisioned that our coming together would enable us to share our experiences and, through the telling of our stories, we would be able to reflect on them and acquire a greater understanding of them. This understanding of our

experiences, how they shaped and influenced our ways of being and knowing, would perhaps help us to understand our questions and why we ask them.

I was also intrigued by what would happen as a result of our acquiring new understandings and the reconstructing our knowledge. I thought of the stories and questions which would be given birth to us as a result of our coming together. What would become of our beliefs about principalship, our practices, how we lived our administrative lives, our personal lives? What I imagined was that together we would create a new story as a group that would shape the living and telling of each of our own unique stories as principals.

The Invitation

I extended an invitation to five colleagues. I contacted them by phone and briefly shared the purpose of my call. I asked if I could come and talk to them to provide them with a more complete picture of what it was I was hoping to create and why. I had indicated that...

> I would like to get a group of women together, who are elementary school principals, to talk about their lives as women administrators and as women, a chance to tell and listen to our own and to each other's stories.
>
> Field Notes September 3, 1992

I had arbitrarily chosen five as the number of colleagues I would invite though I had more people I would like to have included. I purposefully kept the members to five so the group would have a better chance of having conversations which fostered and built a trust among us. This trust would hopefully provide the opportunity for us to share stories that we never thought we would have the opportunity to tell. Our small group would also help

all of our voices to be heard, not to be lost, silenced as it often is the case in our meetings. The ease and comfort facilitated by the smaller number would also help us to deal with the "discomfort" that would arise as we shared our stories and discovered their roots, meanings and impact on our lives.

During the process of pulling the group together I received a call from a colleague I had known since my first year of teaching. We had started our teaching careers together at the same school. Though her call was not related to work, I asked her how things were going. Our conversation lasted for and intensive forty-five minutes. Though we shared some of our favourite memories of our time teaching together, we spent most of our time sharing our thoughts and feelings around principalship and how it changed our lives. I had forgotten the sense of trust and caring that had existed between us as young teachers. I did not want to lose it again so I told her what I was doing and asked her if she would be interested in joining the group. She said yes. I felt an incredible re-awareness of a community I had experienced long ago. This awareness was another awakening to the strength we had given to each other as young teachers. I had not really known how important this community was, how much value existed in our conversations, in the sharing and making of spaces for people to be together. I did not think about it. I lived it. There was not an awareness of it. It was only after it was gone and because of my conversation with Ann that reflection nurtured an appreciation and an understanding of the community we had.

In speaking to my other colleagues they all responded eagerly to my invitation and the purpose behind it. Responses to my invitation were...

That sounds terrific. What a good idea. When will it be?

> Wonderful. I'd love to. I'm really interested in story and sharing. Thanks for thinking of me and asking me. I can hardly wait.
>
> Have you set the times yet? When can all the others come? Call me as soon as you know.
>
> Oh, that sounds like a wonderful idea. It will be so good to have that time.
>
> Field Notes September 3, 1992

I met with three of them individually. Of the group they were the ones I "knew" the least and felt I should establish an initial relationship with them individually. I felt that my meeting with each of these women would help them feel more welcome and comfortable in the group. At least they would know me a little more and this could be a link for them to feel more a part of the group.

Their responses to the purpose of the group and the desire to participate closely matched those of the colleagues I knew better. Those initial meetings were very important in that they went far beyond my explaining the purpose of my study. I sensed that the voices of each woman seemed to be wanting to be heard but was not being invited or given permission to speak.

In those times each of my colleagues shared aspects of their professional lives and their home and personal lives. Each one of them seemed to have been waiting for one to make a space for such a coming together with colleagues. They wanted to dialogue with each other. I sensed this because in each initial meeting there was not a lot of time spent explaining the proposed research.

> Of our hour together I spoke specifically about my project for maybe ten minutes. Though I tried to slip it in she had much she wanted (needed) to say that day. I was her listener.
>
> Field Notes September 10, 1993

Then she said...

> The hardest task will be getting time. I really want to be part of the group, but I'll have to check out the family calendar.
>
> I'll call you next week.
>
> Good. Talk to you then, thanks for coming - it was good to talk, to talk to you.

Conversation September 10, 1993

One spoke of the aloneness of the job, the need to both have support and to give support. The need was expressed that if there wasn't a connectedness, a reciprocity between and among staff, could the job really be done as it should be?

The accent needs to be on the ministering!

Conversation September 11, 1993

A final comment was, "There's just so much we need to think about and talk about and then do it" (Field notes, September 1992).

Another shared the frustration she felt when "expectations keep increasing which fall more into 'administrative' work and still to be able to create a school which is a good place for kids" (Field notes, September 1992). This woman acknowledged the need for some paper work, administrative work, but it was at the expense of her working with teachers and students.

She shared her choice of being silent in principal's meetings and how she responded with "Simply fine, everything's fine" (Field notes, September 1992), when asked how things were going.

The last colleague I met with shared concerns and doubts about career choices. She often found herself thinking "Am I doing the right thing? I'm always wondering,

always re-examining my choices." (Conversation September 11, 1992). We spoke of how the work of a principal took so much from hers and my heart and soul, so much more than management or administration.

My initial fear that my colleagues would not be interested or too busy was unfounded. I, too, eagerly awaited our first gathering which was to be in three weeks at my home, it would allow for a relaxed and comfortable setting for our conversations. I had made arrangements for my family to be busy out of the house so that our sharing would not be interrupted. It was intended to be a time for us to talk with each other while we shared food and wine!

Context for Searching

I wanted to "care for" these principals by making a space where we would be comfortable, where we could eat and drink together. We had agreed to meet once every three weeks from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. This time was arrived at very easily as it accommodated our personal and home schedules, allowing each of us to be home with families early in the evening. We were ready, that is, at least the time and space were secured. I would provide the meal for us all to share and we would all share our stories through conversations.

October 14, 1992, was chosen as our first date for gathering. The sharing started with great intensity, quickly by-passing the "social niceties". The "Hi! How are you?" was responded to with sincerity. One woman shared the stress of working with a teacher experiencing extreme difficulty; another listened intently for she was involved in such a

situation as well. This conversation was a major focus for the evening as we all had dealt with similar situations.

> I mean it was really evident that this was a person who would need an incredible level of support and an assignment that was reasonable. At the same time I had to put children in his classroom and that's the hardest decision I've ever had to make. I agonized over that for a long time, I don't know how many tears I shed over that and still do when I think about it. Cause I wouldn't have put my own child in there and yet I put somebody else's in there.
>
> Conversation October 14, 1992

After that "gut wrenching" sharing, about an hour long, we retreated to safer topics. We retreated a lot in terms of our sharing. We covered many, many topics and issues. In a short space of time, we spoke of the process for permanent certification; of colleagues providing informed and "true" references; of the coming together of our professional organization and school district regarding teacher certification; of who shapes our association; of the relationship between teachers and student teachers; of our concern for our own children at school; of what we and others remembered of our school days. We placed so many pieces of stories on our table, all important to hear and to say more about, but they were fragments, like pieces of a quilt before they are stitched together.

I began to be aware of two aspects of the study. The first was the need displayed by the group members to talk of as many things as possible, to grasp the opportunity in case it did not present itself again. There was a need to speak and to be heard, a rush to cover the issues, at least to get them on the "table".

The second aspect was how we shared or did not share the personal aspects within the topics and issues raised. I realized how we were not connecting our story pieces with threads taken from our personal lives, how we were not sharing our stories

within the topics and issues raised. Our conversations were remaining within the folds of our professional lives.

Sharing many issues, in addition to showing an urgency to address them, could possibly have been helping us to keep the space between the issues and our personal stories. With so much to talk about, silence did not enter our conversation. Silence may have provided a space where a personal story may have been told. We were sharing as we were accustomed to sharing, possibly trying to avoid what Carol Gilligan found of women when they speak.

> The difficulty women experience in finding or speaking publicly in their own voices emerges repeatedly in the form of qualification and self-doubt, but also in intimations of a divided judgement, a public assessment and private assessment which are fundamentally at odds.
>
> (Gilligan, 1982, p. 16)

By not sharing the personal aspects of our stories, we may have been trying to avoid the experience of a "divided judgement". However, we were devaluing what really is a strength we have, that is, the recognition and valuing of others' views. We were devaluing the care and concern we show through our attempts to connect with others. Our personal stories would show this characteristic but how and what we shared in our first times together revealed a reluctance to recognize and value this trait.

Our need to share as well as what and how much we shared characterized our first four gatherings. Still, I was initially surprised at the nature of our first four times together. This was because of what I knew about each of my colleagues and what I had experienced in my initial individual conversations. They each had shared very personal stories, glimpses into how life was going. I also knew that each one held very strong and

passionate beliefs about schools, about learning and especially about their students. Where were these stories, the ones that gave rise to the issues and dilemmas? What of all they had shared about their personal lives and the combining of career and family? Would they enter into our conversations? I sensed a community with them but it was on an individual basis. They each had a connection with me, not with each other. Our group was not yet a community. I should not have been so surprised at what stories the women shared and how they told them. I was doing the same thing! I was not certain where I fit in the "not yet" community. What stories could I share? I knew what I wanted to talk about, but there was that thought of "Am I the only one?" overshadowing my sharing. Talking to one other woman seemed and was safer. After all I could always say that she had misunderstood what I had said, but this could not be so easily done after sharing with the group. Again, the notion of being judged by criteria that do not recognize what we as women value made our initial sharing tentative and guarded.

Our community started to emerge on a sincere yet bordering on a safe and somewhat superficial level. This was in part due to our responsiveness and attentiveness to one another. With each gathering people checked on "how things were going" since our last time together. What made this "checking" so integral to developing a sense of community was the specificity with which it was carried out. We asked about people and the situations spoken of in previous meetings. The message we gave to one another was that we really listened to what was shared, that we cared enough to ask and were truly interested.

Hi, good to see you again. Lots of catch up...haven't seen you for so long.

* * * * *

I'm having a great year, my hornet, my fox and my grouch left!

Conversation October 14, 1992

How are things going? Have you met with the lawyer yet?

I need to call you, need to talk. You know the demands of family and to meet their needs and the demands of work.

How is he now when you leave for work?

Conversation November 18, 1992

This "checking" seemed to be our way of connecting and reconnecting. It was however, only the beginning of the establishment and nurturing of trust within the gathering, the trust that seemed essential to establishing community.

We also showed a valuing for one another's voice for when we were deep into conversations. We listened intently, looking at the one sharing. We did not interrupt nor did we judge personal stories that were shared. There seemed to be an unspoken ethic that our personal stories were to be accepted and valued. This does not mean, and I do not intend to give the impression, that we had "demure discussions".

How do you bring people in who may not agree with you, but cause you to think?

But you know, Linda, I wouldn't as a principal in a school, would you do that, bring in a speaker that you didn't feel comfortable with?

Just to give your staff an opportunity to reflect? I'd be very hesitant.

Yes I would be hesitant. But don't we, shouldn't we listen and then give people an opportunity to respond and reflect. Who should determine, choose who will be heard?

I don't know if we have that, it's a big risk to take.

I wanted people to speak up at my school who were aligned with what I believed and the vision we were developing. It's hard to say let's listen

and see. It's noble but I don't know if I was there. In all honesty, I know I wouldn't be.

But then for the reason that we may shut down our voices, we may shut down other's voices.

Maybe it's the way we're organized. The way schools are. Are they (staff) really going to spill their guts to you when they know we bring in people who are aligned?

Probably when staff posed "those" questions they were the best questions. Either made me feel stronger, clarify or rethink some ideas.

The whole idea of bringing in people who are aligned with your thoughts is not unique to schools. All large institutions do...

Key is the trust that grows over time. If there is trust they do question.

Trust doesn't come easily.

Conversation October 14, 1992

Often we questioned, challenged and took issue with opinions we shared but what always held was the nature of our responsiveness. It went beyond mere respect and took on more of a "seeking of understanding" approach. We found ourselves asking each other to tell more, to explain why or how they acted in certain situations. We were not feeling a need to defend and promote our actions but were finding that often when questioned we did not feel a need to have a definitive response. Rather we were able to re-visit and re-think what we had done. Sometimes this resulted in a better understanding of a situation, sometimes more questions arose.

Didn't you think it was interesting that the Board didn't decide to go forward with the principals out of the bargaining.

I don't know. (sigh)

I guess they see it differently and they have a different role. But it certainly is a mixed role to play and having lived through this _____ thing

I can support it really strongly that we are in a different position you know.

Yeah? Umm.

Well there are other issues and I know that you hear that stories, well B.C. and how it's made a difference but I don't know...

It's been interesting for me that one, because when it first started I was at _____, and it, the collegiality that was established at that school and it was really special...

And it's not that it was your first school?

No. It was just the mix of people. It was perfect somehow, we just seemed to come together and it was, it was just a perfect situation. And at that time I thought if my role were different here, we wouldn't be able to have this.

But, what, is that true though? Would your role have been different?

And perhaps not, maybe we would have been able to have that, but I thought that that (my role) would be effective there. The school I'm at now I would very much like a different role, because it's hard to, to...

You're not so much of a friend, a colleague now?

You're more of an administrator?

Yes, very much so. This is unfortunate. And I think with some people I play the other role too.

Sure.

So um, there are those who that if I don't make it very clear what the expectations are they don't do it.

Um, uh uh.

Which is unfortunate I mean, because ideally I'd like to talk to someone on a professional level and say this is our job, this is our responsibility, you know and see that commitment and so on. But I don't see it with all of that staff here, that's for sure.

Conversation October 14, 1992

Indeed, more questions were being asked by us, of each of us and of us as a group. The initial need to share the surface level stories had undergone a transition. We were now sharing our personal stories. From these sharings, our questions increased in both intensity and complexity. The trust we had created within our group, among ourselves, made it possible for us to share these stories which revealed more of ourselves.

> But the immediate discussion today was really intense. I don't think we waste any time.
>
> Um, uh uh.
>
> We don't waste any time.
>
> Yeah, no time wasted.
>
> Just like, like no one has asked did the Blue Jays win?
>
> (laughter)
>
> It's true isn't it.
>
> (laughter)
>
> It's right to the soul.
>
> Right to each other's lives.
>
> Conversation October 14, 1992

The questions arising from our stories penetrated deeply into our understanding of our professional and personal lives. Our conversations centred on:

- How we live our administrative lives, how we define and see the job.
- How we came to be school principals and why we continue.
- The importance of relationships within schools, what fosters and hinders the creation of them.

- How we balance our work and home lives and responsibilities.
- What it means to be a woman and to be a school principal.

As I began to listen to the tapes, these became the themes around which our conversations revolved. Conversations around these questions came about as we spoke of our daily experiences. One evening we found ourselves asking "Why have we never asked these questions before? Why haven't we met and talked to one another before this?". We were amazed that we had not. We were discomforted when we shared the possible reasons for our not coming together before. We talked about our stories being different than those of our male colleagues and, as Gilligan (1982) says, "...it is difficult to say 'different' without saying 'better' or 'worse'" (p. 14). Our experiences and how we lived our lives were going to be, had been, judged according to a standard that we had not been involved in constructing and establishing. This standard had served to silence our stories and ourselves. It was on this evening we discovered and acknowledged our purpose, our need to continue meeting and sharing.

A friend once shared "when someone shares their story, you have the responsibility for it" (Sewall, 1992). That responsibility was very much on my mind. I believed that all of us would care and keep the trust in which each story was shared. At the same time, our private sharing would lead to the possibility of living new stories that, perhaps at one time, would not have been possible.

THE LETTERS

> It is clear that the sense of meaning and continuity that is achieved through the storying of experiences is gained at a price. A narrative can never encompass the full richness of our lived experience.
>
> White and Epston (1990, p. 11)

As I sat down and began to "write up" my research I found myself experiencing difficulty in finding a match between what had taken place in our times together and a writing style, genre, which captured the essence of our conversations. I was faced with the dilemma of attempting to have the narrative tell as much as possible of the richness of our lived experiences, knowing that much could not be captured and told.

> ...life experience is richer than discourse. Narrative structures organize and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story.
>
> Bruner (1986, p. 143)

I chose to write letters. Letters would come the closest to capturing the essence of our community, the trust within it, and reflecting the feelings within the stories shared. Letters would make it possible for our conversations to continue, for us to hear our stories, our voices again. Letters would create yet another opportunity for each woman to re-experience, re-tell, and re-create her story. I believe that letters would help each of us to make sense of our experience together and lead us to new lived stories, stories that may not have been lived if we had not shared our stories.

In my letters, stories are retold. Each woman's voice is captured in the letters through the sharing of the conversations however their names are not. Pseudonyms were chosen, though the women did not initially believe it was necessary. Vulnerability was however an issue and many of our conversations shared were very personal and sacred

stories. Our names however were totally abandoned in my conversation transcripts but this decision was not made based on vulnerability and to protect the storyteller. I chose to follow this course of action to show the power of our togetherness. A story may have been shared by one woman but belonged to all of us. This collective claiming is symbolized by the absence of naming the storyteller(s) in the conversations. The absence of a woman's name to her story shows the connections we found through the sharing of our individual stories and the understanding and shared ownership we realized because of our sharing. Our strength was realized by claiming all of the stories, the absence of naming individual stories shows the connections we found within our individual stories and the story they together tell. The absence of an individual woman's name is also an invitation for other women to share and claim their stories.

A LETTER TO MAUREEN

Dear Maureen:

I've been thinking about our beginnings, how each one of us started out as a teacher and now each of us is, or has been, a principal. Though we have all taken on the principalship at different times in our lives, we all have found ourselves in that position of leadership. Now, it is not that I find it peculiar that we all have held that job but what strikes me is that if any one of us had been asked at the beginning of our careers, "Do you plan on becoming a principal?", our responses would not have been "Yes, of course". Our conversations have led me to believe that such a question, if posed, would have received responses such as "No"; "I've never thought about that"; "Me?"; or simply a perplexed look!

What was the basis of our responses? In composing our lives, what were we using as references for scripting our stories? Were we planning our lives and careers to accommodate what we had experienced and what would repeat itself in our gendered world? I believe that our experiences as young girls in school would mirror what Gaskell and McLaren and Novogrodsky (1988) discovered about the course choices made by female high school students. These young women chose courses that would lead to jobs that, in turn, would allow them to balance being home, providing care for children and fulfilling the domestic role. Perhaps another factor influencing our lack of an active seeking out of principalships is that administration is carried out mostly by men. Occupational sex-typing causes gender, in this case that of the male, to be regarded as an occupational trait, that is, a norm for the job as Lafontaine and McKenzie (1985) found.

Kanter (1977) contends that organizational structures limit the opportunities for women in that "opportunity, power and relative number...have the potential to explain a large number of discrete individual responses to organizations" (p. 246). Our lack of initial aspiration for the principalship may be partly explained by what we saw as an organization where the vast majority of the members were men, presenting a picture of little opportunity for women to occupy the principalship because of their low visibility. Organizations which have this profile or look about them serve only to fortify sex-typing of an occupation, in this case, the principalship.

I think about the conversation Flora and I had. We shared that while we had entered education to become teachers, we were open to trying different work assignments. However, we did not go out in search of them.

> You know I never set out or intended on becoming a principal. Never thought about it, I was a teacher.
>
> Same here.
>
> Conversation November 18, 1992

Here Flora and I confirm that we were teachers and that was what we had set out to do. Teaching was our first choice, our career choice. Administration was not a consideration. Our decision mirrors what Shakeshaft (1987) found about women entering education. They do so in order to teach, whereas men enter the field to administer. She also states that women may show a lack of interest in principalship because they wish to achieve in a career they chose early in their lives, that is, teaching. It was only after successful teaching experiences that we considered other assignments and they were not principal assignments.

But it seemed that, like well different opportunities come up and well I thought why not, maybe, doesn't hurt to try so I did. Even when I got a consultant position...I well, I wasn't thinking of being a principal.

But when you look, when I look at my life, when you look at all of our lives they've all had changes.

Many changes, uh uh.

Many changes and maybe that's maybe that was the key, maybe who knows, why they had changes but we all did experience them and each time I had a change it was energizing, exciting all of that - the career has been stimulating.

Right, very stimulating. How many of the changes did you initiate and how many did someone else initiate? I know there'll be both cause there has been for me.

Yes, yes, there has been both.

Conversation November 18, 1992

Maureen, what struck me when I listened to this conversation and reflected further was that I had initiated many changes for myself within teaching. I changed teaching assignments within my school and transferred to different schools so I could have different experiences. I enjoyed the changes and the challenge. I knew that with each move I would leave behind something I would miss, a colleague, a group of kids, but each move did bring with it new insights and experiences. Why, one of the moves found me working with a very capable woman administrator who served both as a role model and mentor for me. A good move for me for sure!

In this reflection I discovered that even though I had initiated my teaching moves, I did not self-initiate my moves into leadership positions. In each of these cases, it was either a principal, a supervisor or a teaching colleague who encouraged me to apply. I realized the importance of role models in my career. Four women vividly come to mind,

women with whom I could identify and who served as mentors. Shakeshaft (1987) differentiates between role models and mentors in that to be a role model one must be of the same sex. For mentors this is not necessary, as they need only provide information, support and guidance. My role models were very important in that they showed me a woman could do the job and do it in a way with which I could identify and feel comfortable. They framed principalship from a female perspective. It was also these women who supported and encouraged me to seek principalship. Flora shared in our conversations that her first principal, when she began teaching, was a woman and how important that proved to be for her in years to come. For both of us having women role models was very powerful in helping us to broaden our visions of our careers and in seeking principalship. Our experiences echo the findings of Edson (1981) who wrote that when women were encouraged to apply and were successful in securing administrative positions, this resulted in more women applying for such jobs. I believe it is the perceived removal of some of the organizational barriers, and the occupational sex-typing which encouraged women to consider and to pursue administration.

We all took consultant or specialist positions, assignments where we found ourselves working with teachers, providing support to them. This is a "typical" career choice or method for women to assume a leadership position (Stockard, 1984).

I believe that in applying for these positions we, as women, were showing a preference for working with colleagues, rather than being the "leader", that is, the principal. These times in our careers served like an incubation period, a period where we were cultivating, for ourselves, the way we would live our lives as principals. We were

engaged in a composing process, that would be described as a "living" of our career plans rather than a pre-determined, objective, planning for them on paper.

Our conversations about how we came to be principals do not reveal a carefully mapped out plan that we were consciously implementing in order to achieve the goal of principalship. We all took a circuitous pathway, experiencing various situations and circumstances that unfolded in our lives. We were not concerned or driven by planning the next step we had to make as shown on our career plan. We had to weave many experiences into our lives, our career plans were embodied within us. They were our living of our lives. Without a "plan" dictating our decisions for living, we may have been spared an outcome speculated in Bateson (1990), that is, "that conscious purpose might be a fatal characteristic of the human species, leading human beings to pursue narrowly conceived purposes without an understanding of their destructive effects" (p. 234).

Our career plans, as we lived them, creating and changing their nature in response to demands in our personal and professional lives, are often viewed as not being assertive and definite, that is, as if we were not "taking control" of our lives. In fact, our career paths show a great deal of skill in organizing and to seeing not only to our professional and personal lives but also to the lives of our families. Rubin (1983) uses the phrase "competing urgencies" to capture the sense of what it means to be a woman who is a wife, mother and someone who works outside of the home. These competing urgencies were, for us, the substance of our career paths, the clay from which we sculpted our lives. The demands on our time certainly did not permit us to pursue any of the narrowly conceived purposes to which Bateson refers.

The conversation that you and Beth shared gives me some insights into my discovery of my "non-career-path plan". We had a good belly laugh when you both shared your stories. We all confessed that night to not having a "career path". Having a career path did not seem to be essential, even necessary, in order to have a fulfilling career. In fact, a career path seemed rather foreign, a blueprint that was not required.

> Women don't apply for administration until they think they are ready and they've done their course work and some type of preparation where the men...
>
> (chorus of voices) apply right away. (laughter)
>
> Yeah, I've taught for three years and I know it!
>
> I know it! I've got my career path ready. (laughter)
>
> That's right - a career path...
>
> I said to myself - a career path - have I ever had a career path? And then you think are you not in control of your life, if you don't have a career path?
>
> I remember some years ago, I don't know if any of you were principals at the time, but we were asked to write our career path, what we thought our career path would be and put it in our files. I didn't do it. I didn't know what my life was going to be and I thought there's something wrong with me...
>
> I was asked that question two years ago.
>
> Yeah, I think I remember being asked that question.
>
> Do you? Were you?
>
> I thought there must be something wrong with me...why can't I imagine where I want to be ten years from now? I really didn't know. What I was doing then was great and I would wait and see what else came up...
>
> But I was asked that question by _____.
>
> Yeah, well he's always been...

He's very much goal oriented. Uh uh, uh uh.

And working for him, I knew he was the one who had to put my name forward so I thought he doesn't know me from a hole in the hill so I made an appointment to go and see him and I just said, you know, I'm interested in being a principal, but you don't know me, you don't know who I am, what I stand for so I'd like to have some conversations or some _____ from you so you know what I stand for. So on the second conversation of that he said, so what is your career path between now until when you retire?

I see what you did as a very female thing you did, I want to talk to you, you know, to know me but he wanted your career path.

I want you to know who I am - what I stand for!

He probably thought all I need is your career path lady and then I'll know you. (laughter)

Yeah, it, it really threw me.

Conversation January 19, 1993

"I thought there was something wrong with me." We all thought that even though we were laughing. Both you and Beth expressed surprise at being asked for a career path and, more importantly, did not believe a "career path" would really represent you now or, as you said, "ten years from now". The dilemma is that if we presented our career paths, they would not resemble what is usually regarded as a "proper career path plan." Young (1989) contends that how we define career is critical, especially in light of how women's careers unfold. Young (1989) draws attention to the original definition of career in the Oxford English Dictionary as being a person's course of progress through life (or a distinct portion of life) in contrast to the modern usage of the term which refers to career as also being "a course of professional life or employment, which affords opportunity for progression or advancement in the world". In the transition from using the original

definition to the modern interpretation, I believe career paths such as ours were lost. A way to understand our lives became obscure because of the narrowness of the definition. This is an example of Bateson's fear of humans following narrowly defined purposes! Biklen (1986) contends that our usual and accepted definition of career is restrictive and narrow not recognizing nor including aspects of women's lives within it. I believe the narrowness of this modern usage disenfranchises not only our personal career paths, but those of all women. We begin to see that our career paths are not valid and we try to construct them according to the "new" accepted definition.

> He was going to pursue what he really wanted and he wasn't going to pretend he wanted something else. And then he didn't get a principalship and so he applied. And so it tells you a lot, that he sees it as a stepping stone...
>
> And he has been honest about that from the start, there's no doubt...yeah, uh... I don't know...I admire that in him as he knows what he wants and he's going to go out and get that but what I see a lack of and maybe it would be different in his own school but...you know I think about when I went into _____ as assistant...I had a young child.
>
> She was just a babe, a toddler.
>
> Yeah, she was, three, four, whatever, and I was totally committed to my job...I mean I did everything I could at home to make sure that she was well cared for but I was totally committed and my job came first most often now occasionally that well, it worked...
>
> Well, at least then they came out even.
>
> Well it did, ...no it doesn't. No they don't, I don't think it does.
>
> It doesn't, I can't say that it does.
>
> It, it, it took precedence and fortunately I was in a situation where my husband was willing to pick up some of the slack and so but...but I don't see that with him, the commitment that I had. Now we're different, we're different people and I recognize there are going to be those differences but he's in a position to prove himself in leadership and I don't see him

> doing that. I see the level of commitment being different. The difficulty that we have that I have I think is how do I evaluate that because the only thing I can go on is what I was doing.
>
> Your experiences.
>
> And that's the basis you use.
>
> Conversation December 2, 1992

The tension between the defined career plan and our lived career paths resonated in Ann's story. We applaud and recognize or at least attribute strength to the person who knows what they want and goes out and gets it. Ann was torn when she had to evaluate a staff member and she felt that the level of commitment was the key issue. She had needed to make a full commitment to her first administrative position which meant that her child, her family, came second. She did not feel good about that at the time and still has second thoughts about choices but she believed that she had made a decision to accept a position of leadership and would work very hard to do it well, to do it according to pre-defined and pre-determined descriptions and expectations. Flora echoed the same level of commitment when she said that

> It's hard not to have the job take precedence, it really is, you feel like, I've accepted it, I've said I'll do it, it isn't an eight to four job, and when I say yes, I mean yes.
>
> Conversation December 2, 1992

Both women were caught in a scenario of carrying out two full-time jobs, family and administration. This is not the typical experience for men who enter administration. Shakeshaft (1987) notes that "for most men, family responsibility is work responsibility - bring home the pay cheque. For most women, work responsibilities are added to home tasks" (p. 89).

Though we all expressed uneasiness and dissatisfaction with the "choices" we had to make the option of re-imagining and re-defining the administrative role was not put forth as a consideration, a possibility. We were perpetuating the definition of administration and how it should be carried out.

> Among the most pressing items on the agenda for research on adult development is the need to delineate in women's own terms the experience of their adult life...the inclusion of women's experience brings to developmental understanding a new perspective on relationships that changes the basic constructs of interpretation. The concept of identity expands to include the experience of interconnection.
>
> Gilligan (1982, p. 173)

As Gilligan points out women's experiences have not been included in the research which now defines reality, not only how things are put, how they should be. Until the voices of women are heard and listened to in research we will always be attempting to fit our career paths into a narrow definition of administration, keeping home and work separate by having to choose between the two. If we are to be heard and participate in the re-shaping and re-defining of reality, I believe we must ask ourselves several questions and reflect on our responses. A question that I feel needs to be addressed for us surrounds the notion of commitment. What does it mean? It is commitment to one's career? Commitment to one's family? What does commitment look like? We didn't really choose one over the other. We made it appear that way. We tried to match the stereotype of an administrator but we still carried out our family jobs. We worked hard so that family was not seen as taking precedence over work, so that there was no negative effect on how we were seen to carry out an administrative job. This is a critical "cover story" (Olsen, 1993) for us. By cover story I mean a surface story, not the

one that speaks of how it really is. This cover story is necessary for securing and keeping administrative positions because of the erroneous belief on the part of school boards and senior administrators that women are unable to balance family and work and that it is inappropriate to even attempt it (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 113).

Ann was feeling torn between what she had to do when she took an initial leadership position and with what she was asking of and expecting of her staff member now. I believe she was not struggling with the notion of her staff member having to go through what she did to become an administrator because that's the way it's done, but questioning why it has to be done the way it is. What are the personal costs to women when they pursue administration? What are the costs for children and family? Should we demand and perpetuate such career plans for women and men in educational administration?

When I reflect on our careers and think again that our first leadership positions were not in schools. We all had been encouraged to apply for consultant positions which we viewed as being a role in which we would work with, and provide support to, teachers. Only after being in these positions did some of us think about the possibility of becoming a principal. Even though success was experienced both in teaching and in consulting, principalship was not actively pursued. When two of us were asked if we might be interested in being school principals, we replied "yes, perhaps, sometime in the future maybe". When the opportunity was given and a position was offered there was not always an eager "yes, I'll take it".

> ...when I was first offered a principalship, they called me and said do you want to be, you know we're offering you the principalship at _____ and I dithered and dathered and I was afraid and all that and then finally I said okay but I want you to know that I haven't the first clue about how to start so I'm coming back a week before school starts and I needed and at

that time I was naive, I believed that a consultant could help me to know,so I said I want a guarantee that someone will be there to help me that first week cause I haven't a clue what to do...

The consultant in administration, I remember he came out to see me and I was sitting in this office and I didn't know where to start I literally, it was one week before school started and I thought where am I, what do I do now - here I am sitting in this office, schools going to start what am I supposed to do? So he came out and he chatted with me, how was my holiday blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah and then...he left with this...before school starts you must have a supervision schedule. (boisterous laughter)

Legally you must know who's going to be out there to watch the kids and he left!

Conversation October 28, 1992

Maureen, it seems that in spite of the richness of your career path, there was still self-doubt about becoming a principal. You found that you weren't alone. Each one of us had talked about "getting ready" or having other experiences first which might help us if we did decide to pursue principalship. I wonder if the "mystique" of leadership, how it has been defined and how we have experienced it contributes to the self-doubt, the getting ready for the job syndrome. Principalship has historically been a job given to men though the large majority of teachers are women. Women are under represented in leadership positions. By becoming a principal, you, each one of us, enters a male domain. Shakeshaft (1989) believes that a culture characterized by male dominance acts as a major barrier to women seeking administrative careers. She also contends that "the socialization process of women results not only in role conflict for women but in behaviours that are traditionally feminine and that are not considered (but that in fact are) the behaviours of good administrators" (p. 114).

Maureen, our conversations show that not only did we not recognize and value our career paths and name them as such in spite of their "eclectic" appearance, we were also not recognizing them as being fertile ground from which principalship could grow.

Our stories about becoming principals, were the beginning of an awareness of how our experiences were shaping and determining how we would carry out our jobs. Clandinin and Connelly (1991) suggest that, "the process of cultivation occurs when an individual, a group of individuals, an institution or a culture acts upon a person". They go on to say that "when there is no reflection or when the reflection no longer occurs to open further possibilities, the boundaries of knowing are established. Therefore, in some ways, it is in the process of cultivation that a person's horizons of knowing are constructed". Our conversations were initial glimpses at the "cultivations" which had shaped our horizons of knowing. We didn't reflect on why we took the pathways we did, nor did we question choices made by and for us. What we did was recognize and acknowledge our "non-career plans", our pathways as being different but valid. This claiming of our experiences, the recognizing that the accepted definition of career plan did not capture and reflect our lives, and thus it must be redefined was a critical point for us in coming to know the "constraints of our cultivations". Our claiming, through our telling, would enable us to participate in the cultivation of our lives. Then, much like when one claims a plot of land one needs to work it, to come to know and understand it so as to know all the possibilities that exist for cultivation, we now can cultivate, our land being our stories. Maureen, our stories are rich soil, our reflections will be the seeds of awakenings, and we will become what we are...

I kept trying to say this is the way I am. I need to talk through things, I need to try out ideas, I'm not sure you need to live with that ambiguity, I don't have all the answers, that's the way I am...

Conversation October 28, 1992

Ending with your words the "way I am" is truly a beginning.

In celebration of our becoming what we are,

Linda

A LETTER TO BETH

Dear Beth:

I have just finished my letter to Maureen and have written to her about our "becoming principals". While writing to her I often saw in my mind the two of us, you and me, standing out in front of my school a few years ago. I don't know if you recall our conversation but I certainly remember it. You were working in a consulting position and had been out to share some ideas on curriculum. It had been a very productive meeting and we had arranged for you to come and meet with the teachers to share ideas around the use of literature. I was excited about the opportunity.

After we finished planning I walked you out to your car. It was one of those mornings when the sun warms one quickly and the tiny leaves budding makes the promise of spring seem so close. Just as we finished our conversation and I was about to say good-bye you asked me, "Do you like being a principal?" You asked in a very serious and thoughtful way. My response was "Yes, yes I do". You said that you thought I did, that it had been evident when we were planning earlier on, that there was a great anticipation about working with staff on the literature units. I remember telling you that there had been some rough times but I believed we had something "happening" now in the school. It was a good place for children and teachers. You said something like "I think I'd like to try it someday. I think I would. I want to get back to a school". We talked more about the sense of being part of a school, doing what we really enjoyed, working with students and with teachers. When you left I sensed that you really wanted and needed to return to a school.

Well Beth, you did return to a school and you are now the principal, you are going to get to "try it" as you had quietly and carefully shared that morning. I wonder what our conversations following your appointment as principal tell us about your intentions and beliefs about "doing the job" and those of others.

> ...the reason, why, I thought let's look at principalship, is what I liked doing in the classroom, I thought maybe there would be a whole school that you could do that with.
>
> Yeah, that was my myth too. (laughter)
>
> It wasn't to do admin!
>
> No (laughter) no...
>
> (As a) curriculum co-ordinator I was exploring with them and trying the same kinds of things and tripping over my feet at the same time as they were and certainly a very verbal learner and I enjoyed that role. I really enjoyed that role and I thought I just would take that role on a larger scale into the principalship.
>
> Conversation October 28, 1992

You show in your comments that being the principal of a school did not mean being the "leader" bringing in expertise but rather taking on or continuing on as a colleague who would work with staff in the creation of expertise through shared experiences. That had been what had excited us the day you came out to my school, that is, the anticipation of working together, "being with" a staff. You saw principalship as an opportunity to be a teacher in another dimension but also an opportunity to be a learner. Your decision to apply for principalship resonated with what we all felt in our group conversations. We did not apply because it was a "step up" or a "promotion". The reason behind the decision was founded on a yearning or a need to be back in a school, to be part of a community. I believe that the role you saw yourself taking was what we all

envisioned for ourselves, to be part of a school community, not separated by leadership titles. Shakeshaft (1987) describes two aspects of what she sees as the female world in schools, that is, relationships and community. Most research on administrators has been carried out from a male perspective which is what one would expect as males are the majority. Shakeshaft (1987) believes that, with what is known about women in our jobs, we do spend more time concentrating on relationships and building community. She contends that "women spend more time with people, communicate more, care more about individual differences, are concerned more with teachers, and marginal students and motivate more" (p. 197).

Establishing relationships with staff was very important for you, for all of us in how we believed we should carry out our jobs.

> I think the changes come much more from the individual encounters with teachers around individual children, individual pieces of work, the opportunity to reinforce, and to celebrate what was going really well. And then to, to say "I wonder, I'm not sure, but maybe"..
>
> It's similar to the one instance, um how the discipline policy was very different to what I was comfortable with...and because of my changing on those little interactions with kids and with teachers saying "are we disciplining here or punishing?"
>
> and your modelling...
>
> Yes, what we are trying to do.
>
> so you were raising questions and saying "I don't know, I'm not comfortable with this...
>
> Yes, and then and it was only through them, that they redefined my role (as principal). Now lucky for me it was redefined to a definition I could live with...
>
> That you felt comfortable with...

Yeah, I wasn't seen as... Please send her/him down to the principal's office. But getting that re-definition of the role for some people it may never be redefined, like they do see the principals separate from...

And there are some people who are very uncomfortable with a principal's uncertainties and so when you say I'm not sure, I don't know or you wonder aloud at a staff meeting...that from some staff members you get "Oh for god's sake make a decision, do it, what are you wondering about?"

That's like your dream.

Yeah, I can't dream in front of my staff.

But you know what, don't stop doing that. I kept trying to say that is the way I am, I need to talk.

Well, for instance with the staff who came on new last year and this year I am able to explore with them and they feel comfortable. But the older staff, more entrenched...

but they may watch you doing that with staff and see that nothing earth shattering happens to them as a result of that exploration...and you model the excitement of the exploration.

Actually, what I've done and it's a very small thing but it's making quite a big difference...I've set out my evaluation system for the entire year, the staff last year did not like surprises at all...

You mean as a walk in visit?

No, as meaning like two weeks before I'm going to do my next set of one on one's I want you to be able to talk about this, this and this. So last year I spent several weeks in June thinking, "How am I going to do this next year?" because I know the staff did not like surprises. I decided that I don't like things written in concrete but I think that they'll feel more comfortable if I outline my system for getting at personal goals, how you go about your action plan, and the information I want you to bring to our one on one, so it's all laid out. Now right now I know that I would change something if I could but I'm not going to, I'll wait until next June. But I asked them all to bring three pieces of writing, children's writing, to each of our meetings...so let's discuss what we know about these children.

So you're getting at their beliefs and their understanding through their practice.

Yeah, through their practice and it's working. Because the responses back from them is "I've never had a principal sit and help me analyze children's writing before". And I thought okay, we're making some headway.

So you're not "looking at them". Cause, I know, one on ones, the term, you know, I picture, two, two rams bashing each other, horns, that whole, the metaphor is not one of let's talk...I'm judging.

I used to call them a time to sit and chat. There's so little time to do that. I always figured we'd sit together and we won't be interrupted... Because I really try to make the distinction, like if a teacher's competency is in question it's a totally different issue, then we're dealing with a whole different set of things...but the time to sit and chat is for them to, to help me understand where they are coming from, what it is they're trying to reach in their classroom and for us to have that interaction. A time for me to give them feedback, for them to give me feedback to interaction in those way.

I told them that it was my opportunity for them to tell me what their students were like, because...I don't see each child everyday.

To keep in touch.

And that lowers anxiety.

I found, I just loved those one on ones and I have to believe staff, when they told me, most of them that they enjoyed those. I also did away with formal observation.

I'm going to next year too!

I know, I think we get a really good sense of what we're all about, I'm around the school a lot. I'm in and out of your classrooms, I see the children's work, I see your newsletters that go home...

So you almost create a portfolio of a staff member.

Well, we had files in the office that were open for everybody to put in anything that they wanted. They created their own, very informal.

What an exciting thing for a teacher to look back and to see, like I think of children, one little boy, Chris, who was moving at Easter time so I collected his work up and when he saw some printing of his from the fall

he said "That's not mine...I don't write like that." He hadn't seen his growth, changes.

Yeah, for teachers they may see change, but it may be just an opportunity to see I've accomplished a lot. I'm really pleased with these, this is an area I'd like to move into and explore...

Not to be stressful.

No, right.

I didn't win my teachers over until last June and what I did, I did chapter books as far as their evaluations were concerned. I spent hours and hours putting together anecdotes I had from being in their classrooms. All the things I had seen, conversations I had tried to capture, that sort of thing so I got between three to five type written pages of things I could see about their teaching and I kept it all positive...

So you wrote a story about them.

Yeah and at the end of my last chapter was a seed for growth, that's exactly what it was one seed for growth. Almost in every case they have taken that seed and planted it. Which I find really interesting because they had knocked me all last year, every time I turned a corner and did something they hadn't experienced before they questioned whether I could do it or not so that was a significant learning...

Maybe they're challenging not you so much, Beth, as a person but is this what a principal does?

I tried to move beyond that, to beyond me letting them know to them writing.

That's where I would like to go.

I wasn't successful with all of them but many of them came with their own reflections and so mine simply became a letter of appreciation and I attached their reflections to it.

I tried that.

But I didn't do that with a lot of people...

Conversation October 28, 1992

Our conversation reveals how our experiences as teachers and consultants found us working very closely with people, along side, giving support and receiving support. We, I believe, had a strong sense of what we wanted to do and how to go about it. However, when we found ourselves in the "principal" position, other "ways" of living the role were presented so that we questioned our original beliefs, our tacit knowing, on how to do the job. We were attempting to question, wonder and shape learning experiences in school, along with staff not necessarily deciding ourselves what should be done and implementing a plan. You saw yourself as extending the job you did as curriculum co-ordinator into principalship, concentrating on nurturing working relationships, working as colleagues. This was difficult as you made clear when you shared your dilemma of dreaming out loud.

> Last year, in my first year I had never felt so powerless in my life...I like I felt like I had less than I did when I was a practising teacher.
>
> In terms of? To make change?
>
> Ok, being able to get people doing things, to try something...
>
> Um uh...
>
> When I was a teacher, with uh, another group of teachers somebody would come up with an idea and say listen to this, I did this and I think if we did this la, la, la...we'd be able to make it work in our school. I remember feeling really successful, feeling enthusiastic, really energized, we were just...it was really, a very exciting time. Last year I went in with the idea of, that I could continue that, that role and the first thing I found out was that I could not continue that role...and it's, it's incongruous to why you're chosen to be the principal in the first place! I found that really hard to get used to.
>
> You're not one of them any more and I think I found that almost the hardest to...
>
> Yeah.
>
> You're not one of anything Linda.

No.

(laughter)

But what do we do so we don't have the feeling that you had, like you, like all your successes as being a consultant, a teacher was that collaborative, that let's work together, there was no station in life.

That's where I made the greatest growth in my life, my personal career.

That's right and then all of a sudden that's, all of that is...

I was devastated.

And the other thing that I discovered with the help of _____ one day over coffee, when I was having one of my terrible, no good days and was wondering why I was there...

Um.

She said, she discovered that she was not allowed to dream out loud...

Um.

And I thought, I know what that feels like, that's exactly what it is.

And, and I said and how do you understand that? And she said because you as a principal, with your title, it is assumed that because you dream it you will implement it. And that, because of your title. And I said ah, so I really listened to that and I don't, I don't dream. I don't dream in front of my staff any more.

Really. Don't you feel robbed?

Cheated. Yes, yes I do.

Cause I can remember saying to people, we have to (at those seven o'clock in the morning staff meetings) and I would say I really feel this about this or someone else would say it first and I could say I have the same feeling, and we would dream, dream, dream.

Oh, lucky you.

Conversation October 14, 1992

Your point about why you believed you had been chosen to be a principal did not match with the role or expectations people had of you or that they gave you permission to be. In part, this is due to the definitions of our roles and the expectations which have been borne out of them. "Administer" and "administrator" both refer to the power vested within the act or person of the "doing to" others. "Principal" is defined within the confines of hierarchy, of authority, of importance and of the superiority of the person. Our lives and our conversations about them show us entering principalship through a different door and defining leadership in a way similar to how we had lived our teaching and consultant life, a "working with" way, where people could establish relationships, and dream together. What we were attempting or expecting to do as principals echoes what Kantor (1983) speaks of when she draws our attention to the need to change how people work with one another. She emphasizes that successful organizations not only treat the people within them well but recognize and acknowledge their prime importance within the organization. By holding this view teachers can take a different role on a staff and so can principals, neither being of more "prime importance" within the school. This certainly challenges the role of principal as many people have experienced it or witnessed it. Lieberman's (1986) words make it very clear why it is critical that we address our working relationships, "Contexts, needs, talents, and commitments differ, but one thing appears to be constant: schools cannot improve without people working together" (p. 6).

As principals, we saw our jobs as working together with teachers, parents and students but our conversation tells us we found ourselves not belonging to the group, the community - "not one of them any more". That was a strange situation to be placed in and as you said, "incongruous to why you're chosen to be the principal in the first place!"

We were now in a hierarchy which was defining how the job should be done and were finding this organizational characteristic of the educational system responsible for creating a climate which was in contradiction with the climate we envisaged as necessary for doing our job. We were concerned about our relations with people in our school communities. Noddings (1986) talks about fidelity and how it can be realized in one's response to others when viewed from an ethic of care. She sees fidelity as "a direct response to individuals with whom one is in relation" (p. 497) and we, as principals, were finding barriers in our efforts to establish relations and this was in part due to the historical definition of principal. It is difficult to make a caring, direct response to individuals when you are perceived as not being "one of the group", where equal voice is not realized within the membership of the community and where this is due to the hierarchy of the organization. We struggle with the concept of "belonging" and what must be in place for a community to begin to establish itself with an ethic of care as central to its existence. Would being separated from teachers on a contractual basis affect the staff community and relations in our schools?

> So you wonder, I don't know Flora, your comment about the L.R.B. (Labour Relations Board) and the ruling, I...I'm still grappling with that because I think if we're ever going to make caring communities...does that happen when you're in a management position?
>
> Yeah, I don't know that either.
>
> And yet we are anyway Linda.
>
> Yes, but how do we change that? Make it more that way, or do we say we need it less that way.
>
> I think it's not really what's formalized that has significance as the way we live it. And maybe I'm wrong about that, I've only been in one school, but I know, I don't know, I guess, I believe that the relationship that we

had as a team came from how we lived together, not what I was called or whether I was in or out of the bargaining unit. I don't think it affected the relationships there at all. And maybe I'm wrong because maybe when it changes it would...

Course you don't have the other side to go on.

Right, yeah, and yet I felt that working with _____ and, and how difficult that was some times it would have helped me not being in the bargaining unit.

Um.

It got in the way sometimes of, of the work that I had to do. The reality is we have to do that work and I'll tell you when you're doing it you're not a colleague to that individual.

Uh, uh.

But, you know what keeps coming back when I, you've shared that before, what was hurting you the most was that you still cared for him as a person.

Um, yes.

So, how, even if you were not in the bargaining unit it wouldn't have helped your heart.

No, it doesn't help your heart, that's for sure. I think that process is going to be difficult...

No matter what.

Yeah.

...anytime. I think where it was really difficult was the A.T.A. who was to be my representative too, wasn't. And that cross message, all of the cross purposes that happened, in the whole process, maybe could have been more clearly delineated, if, if we'd been in two separate units. And maybe it's a non-issue. I really don't know. But I guess I felt very resentful at the time.

Well you were hurting.

That I was paying dues, that I had really tried hard to be a person who'd contributed to this profession and I was the enemy from the first day. That I was wrong and that my performance was criticized.

I know that when principals have gone for support...and the person who came out from the A.T.A. said I'm coming, but I'm not taking notes because I'm not testifying in court...

So _____ came and took notes all the time I was working with _____ and then he questioned my performance, and I, I really felt angry, I had worked so hard and it was so stressful, and I was really doing something that I believed in, kids, and I think our A.T.A. should be a professional association and act for the sake of education and not for individuals who aren't performing...

And for that whole entire time I was the one who had to defend my performance...that I was unfair, uncaring, unsupportive. I had too high of expectations, unreasonable assignment.

You know that's interesting though. If we weren't viewed as being the power person or the authority, that almost takes away the argument that the A.T.A. is changing you because if you come, and what you did anyway, you came from a caring perspective, initially, you didn't sit down and say I'm going to get _____ this year. There goes their argument, if that is the community that exists initially in a school.

If we keep digging ourselves into separate trenches if we're ever going to be able to save both sides... It's adversarial. There's no coming together.

We're never viewed I don't think in a collegial way, as soon as you're appointed you are different.

Uh, uh.

Uh, uh.

I don't mind, I know there are different roles but I don't if that helps for staff relations.

* * * * *

Being in or out isn't the factor that's going to make a significant difference. Being, what's going to make the difference is the relationships

of the people who are going to work together, in whatever role. And that being out helps us in situations where we have to take, make a difficult choice and play and play a different role.

But do we need more help at being out or being in?

Conversation December 2, 1992

Our conversation reveals the dilemma of division, of distance between the formal and informal definitions of our jobs. We know that our jobs have certain requirements but are we directed down a certain pathway in order to meet those requirements because of what is believed to be inherent in our role? We discussed staff evaluation where the factor of judgement is often seen as the reason for the process, overshadowing the aspects of support and recognition, even when the latter is our prime reason for engaging in the process.

A two-sided picture is created, showing opposition, separation. This is the formal picture. Our informal one is how we actually see ourselves as principals in this process, as stated "the way we live it". We stress building relations, team building but must do so in a surrounding milieu of division and distancing. This is shown in the discrepancy of support given to administrators and teachers involved in an evaluation and competency situation. The point is made that though we are responsible and accept the responsibility for staff evaluation, we believe we initiate it from a caring perspective, one which supports and encourages teachers' professional (personal) growth. We begin by working with people. However, when circumstances reach a crisis situation the working with becomes a working against, not by choice but because of "formal" definition.

Working from a caring perspective is abandoned just when it is probably needed the most. Caring decisions are not always easy to make and may not be viewed as such by

all parties involved. However, by not following through a process rooted in an ethic of care, more people are hurt than helped. So is our challenge to re-define and align our "role" descriptions addressing the imbalance of power and inequality of voice that exists between principals and teachers? How can we live our lives according to our informal definitions within a framework accentuating hierarchy and divisional organization and representation? The study done in the Surrey school district on principal wellness shows very clearly how organizational frameworks which separate and divide create negative impacts within them. Principals shared that when they were removed from the bargaining unit with their teacher colleagues, they experienced a great sense of aloneness, isolation. School communities which were once caring in nature no longer lent themselves to relations which emphasized receptivity and responsiveness to one another.

The existence of imbalance in relations presents a challenge to the creation of "high fidelity" relations in a community. Noddings (1986) defines "high fidelity" relations as ones where those involved contribute to the relation, maintain fidelity and strive for a refinement of skills that build relational competence (Noddings, 1986, p. 497).

In such communities she contends that "it is (in) this striving for the best in ourselves and in those with whom we interact that marks self-actualization, and a community that embraces this view of fidelity has a strong rationale for socialization, for it is not asking for fidelity to institutions as they are but as they might realistically be at their best" (p. 501).

In seeking to carry out our jobs by concentrating on our relations with people and their relations with us and each other, we were asking them to view school organizations from a different perspective, one where they had equal "voice", where the principal

worked along side, and with, them. This was from our perspective an "invitation to dream out loud together", but past experiences had taught many teachers that dreaming out loud did not often take place and that a principal's voice had more power in the dream. Beth, when you shared that you couldn't dream out loud I felt deeply saddened for you, and for how alone you must have felt. However, I think you are still dreaming and doing it with your teachers in the stories you wrote to them at the year's end. I see, in the seed that you planted with each of them, an invitation to join you in dreaming aloud, to share equally in creating relationships and striving for fidelity within them. A pivotal point in relationships with staff is getting to know them as people, establishing a trust in the working relationship. Our conversation about the context for getting to know each other reminds me of the importance of doing so but also of the risk we all take in our efforts to establish relationships.

> That's what I feel the need for, to be able to talk about it.
>
> And again context is so important, you may have done it (shown emotion) at _____ school but not at ____.
>
> Not yet, right. Still don't know them.
>
> Whereas that, where you are in relation to the other people is important to how you behave to them as people and with a staff as you have now you may have to guard yourself more so than you will in another year.
>
> Yeah, right.
>
> And for Beth too, but the context... Well at _____ it would have gone differently.
>
> Yeah, that's, I'm sure that for us that (relationships) was the magic. As it was for you, because we could all come to one another...
>
> Conversation December 2, 1992

In approaching our leadership by focusing on relations we were, in essence, inviting staff to redefine principalship and how leadership is carried out by the person in such a position. Just as we felt challenged by staff when they expected us to perform our job in ways we found contrary to how we believed principalship should be lived, we too were challenging them by carrying out our work from a relational perspective, concentrating on community, and equality. We were seeking to collaborate with staff, an activity which is often reserved for teachers to participate in while principals get to the business of administering! There seems to be a myth about what a principal does, how we "do it". I do not believe what we do is really clearly understood but in the end it seems that collegiality and collaboration with staff is not high on the role description.

> By the end of the end of two years they (the teachers) had all moved in the direction of the literature and the belief of the reconstruction of language (by students) and you see for me, I mean there are two things, if we want change and if we want change in a specific direction, then we set it up, also that's the direction in which it's going to go, and there's no chance...if what we really want is for teachers to really examine their beliefs and come up with um, a method of operating within the classroom that they truly believe is right then you have to give them a chance to examine all kinds of evidence and then still, so that vis a vis some of them would still come up, saying I've looked at all those beliefs and we've had discussions but I still believe and here look, my kids are learning and so that, that to me, there's a real dichotomy there and I would have to think about...I've always operated on the belief that yeah, there's a direction that I want to take my school um this is what I want to see happening.
>
> and there's so much give that you'll give.
>
> Yeah, there's so much give but within that, this is where I want to go. And it seems to me that if, that if, that if you really believe that teachers are the professionals that they need an opportunity to reflect that what they know that they have personal knowledge, and then you have to live with teachers who are going to be doing something that you don't believe in, but they believe in very passionately and work with them and that's a real struggle for me because <u>what is the role of the principal there</u>?

Shaping the direction of the school, who knows...and can we...I don't know?

Two years after doing this (reflective practice) with teachers, she went back and the teachers were still, the moves they had made, they were still in those areas of beliefs, they were still practising within their new beliefs. And I thought for two years to have passed, and for them to be practising their change I thought they had indeed changed and I was wondering what caused that to happen? So I asked her what the principals did in that, she just - had this big smile - and because she didn't really know because they didn't really participate all of them - some of them did some of them didn't.

The principals didn't seem to have a large role within that study. So that's a really interesting question...

So what is the role for change?

If that's right, maybe in that instance the role is to, to free teachers, to do that examining of their, to encourage that, the examination of one's beliefs, freeing them to come to that position.

Well, the other speaker said that if you believe education is the emancipation for students then (I ask) what is the emancipation for teachers?

That puts into question the whole issue of do we have a right as principals to um, to try and move our schools in a particular direction, and yet for me that was always what I loved about the principalship was that I had this sense of the kind of school that I would like to see for children and I was going to try and shape it, move it in that direction. Now if that's, now maybe I'm not seeing it right and maybe.

Well it's that concept of leader and I guess you think of the leader out there articulating and um um.

I had more influence as a curriculum co-ordinator in a very small program than I have as a principal.

But is that because...

Far more.

<u>because of what people believe a principal is supposed to do be</u>?

I don't know, like, and I find this really, I'm questioning whether I want to be a principal.

Could it be because as a curriculum co-ordinator you were teaching right along side the teacher.

You're still a colleague.

You're still walking your beliefs.

Conversation October 28, 1992

Principals are viewed as being in charge, ultimately responsible. Each of us has shared many situations which have arisen in our schools: the complexity of issues within them; how we tried to have as much staff involvement as possible in coming to solutions or ways in dealing with dilemmas. We were not perpetuating the myth of the principal, as the lone decision maker, having the most importance given to her voice. By involving staff we were making the most of relations that had been established, showing that we valued them. We were collaborating for we realized what Lieberman shared that ..."None of us, no matter what our position, has the answers to the complex problems we face. The more people work together, the more we have the possibility of better understanding these complex problems and acting on them in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect" (p. 6). I underlined "our position" for it is through redefining our job and looking at it from the perspective of "relations" the better our chances will be in coming together to address the complex problems in our schools.

This collaboration, this focus on relations, not only frames principalship differently, but it acknowledges teachers and how it is essential and critical that their "voices" and personal practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) be recognized and given full and equal membership in the school community. The conversations in

schools where such communities exist are ones that will be best able to create schools which meet the needs of their students, for within them, those who know the students well, teachers and others will together be involved in planning and making instructional and curricular decision. Personal and professional growth will be nurtured by concentrating on the development of caring relations within our school communities.

> ...groups...characterized...by equal power relations, willingness to expose, through talking, differences in perspective and proactive and mutual support for modifications in both, offer a way of understanding and encouraging pedagogical change.
>
> Nias (1987, p. 149)

I believe that the existence of such communities will even further change the role of principals as the opportunities arise for teachers (to) become more committed, and self-managing and when schools become true communities, freeing principals from the burden of trying to control people (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 41).

The struggle to live one's job as one believes it should be lived is constant and there are times when the work of establishing relations and nurturing them is draining. Yet we all agreed when Ann said...

> What I feel I should be doing as a principal...that kind of leadership...to be able to be in there, talking to people about philosophy, curriculum, learning, kids all that...
>
> Conversation February 3, 1993

> And your acknowledging that it takes time, a long time to establish relations, that you...didn't win my teachers over until June...
>
> Conversation October 28, 1992

I take heart though that the time and energy we put into relations will help us to live our jobs as we believe we should.

...all of living and all of development takes place only within relationships...

Miller (1986, p. xxi)

Linda

A LETTER TO FLORA

Dear Flora:

In remembering those first individual meetings with each of the women I had asked to participate in my research, what my notes and my memory highlight about our time together was our talk about family. When I called you to set up a time to discuss my proposal, you shared that work was going fine but leaving home each morning was breaking your heart. Your son had cried each and every morning when you left and made it very clear that he didn't want you to leave him. Even though you had spoken to other women who assured you that it was just a stage, not to worry, he'll get over it, you found the experience terrible. You said "One day I was dysfunctional - I kept thinking, am I doing the right thing? I'm always wondering, always re-examining my choices."

Our group conversations often echoed that first conversation. We were trying to understand the fit between our personal and professional lives.

> Where is the line in terms of commitment? I know there isn't one in terms of commitment when we really are going all out...does going all out ever have a ceiling? a line?
>
> Yeah, I know.
>
> Cause I don't think we're good for each other if we don't say, the work is never done. _____ used to phone and say, "Are you coming home now mommy?". "I'll be right there, tell daddy I'm almost finished." And I could hear ____ in the background after ____ told him "Mommy's almost finished." "Tell mommy it's never finished, just to come home, it can continue tomorrow." I thought put my child in the middle of this conversation (laughter) but in a way, I believe he is right, but when do you say...
>
> Well, your head knows he's right but when you're in the middle of something and it seems really important, your body doesn't tell you it's right.

No, but your heart is saying...

It's really hard to leave it and go home, and when you go home and if it isn't over, why are you home anyway?

Because you don't leave it, you don't leave it, and I didn't want to bring stuff home, I hate bringing work home.

Yeah.

Conversation December 2, 1992

I discovered that we used the word "line" when we spoke of the relationship between our personal and professional lives. We were not well served by trying to draw a line between them to separate them. In fact, we questioned if a line ever does or can exist between those two aspects of our lives, lives that were very interrelated. What tension do we create when we try to establish that line?

The notion of having a line of separation between our personal and professional lives suggests that the two are separate entities, that you leave home - forget it - and go to work. It also implies that a sense of balance can be established by keeping each one separate from the other. By tending to one or the other when the "balance" is off, balance can easily be restored. We often seek this mythical balance between personal and professional life and I believe we do so because of the simplicity of the concept, the idea that by tending to one or the other all will be fine, balanced. Yet, our conversations clearly show our lives can not be divided so cleanly. In my letter to Maureen I shared the notion of "competing urgencies" (Rubin, 1983) where it seems we always have demands made on our time and of ourselves and how so often they are made at the same time, each voicing the need for attention first because of their importance. It is much like your leaving in the morning when there is the need for that time to hug and hold your child

but knowing you have a meeting you need to be on time for! I would like to add to Rubin's concept another dimension, that is, the constancy of the competing urgencies. Even if we are not actually experiencing a pull between them does not mean we are not dealing with them, that balance has been established. The constancy comes from our connectedness to each urgency. Our thoughts still remain with the home situation while we are at work and we often call home just to see how things are. And we do the reverse as shown by this conversation...

> Last night, I met with a couple of colleagues last night, we went and had a drink after work, all of us female principals.
>
> Isn't that interesting.
>
> And all of us talked about nightmares about the stresses that our jobs are causing us, to the point where, I went home, I wasn't feeling at all well, and I rarely take a sick day, no matter how bad you're feeling, you pull yourself, drag yourself in and I just felt really lousy, went in, did what I felt I absolutely had to do and went home. And I went to bed and slept and woke up in an absolute cold sweat, I had, all of a sudden I thought, "Oh my god, I've forgotten to do something", and it just, and I really hadn't, I mean it could wait, it's just that I was dreaming about it. And I thought...to have that much pressure on you that you can't even, I might as well go to work. And then I got up and worked, I mean I brought all my work home anyway, so I thought this is ridiculous, I'm going to be here, stewing about this.
>
> I used to have this habit of keeping a pad and pencil by my bed and if I woke up. I did you know, have that. But I always had that little piece of paper because I would think all those details that you can forget.
>
> Conversation December 2, 1992

For us, there isn't a line to cross over. If there were a line, a separation, we could leave one life for the other. The multiplicity of our lives makes this crossing of the line neither feasible nor desirable. It seems not to be our way. Presently, the administrative

role is defined from a male perspective, for men who do not have the major responsibilities on the home scene caring for the family. The profile of the "typical" woman administrator is one who has chosen to not have children, has grown children or private child care arrangements (Shakeshaft, 1987). These pictures of administrators promote the idea of the separation of personal and professional lives, making it difficult for women and men as well to seek leadership positions when they are trying to be more involved with, and responsible for, their families.

However, the notion of a line between our personal and professional lives is real, a defined and expected reality. But the expectation that there is a line comes from men's lives, from a time when a woman stayed home to allow male principals to do their professional work. We must rethink this in the context of our lives, theorize new ways for this line between the professional and the personal to be drawn or not drawn. The line as it exists now is a beginning of our cover stories. Our cover story here is one we've all read about in glossy magazines and papers. You know the one. The plot line is women can do it all, can have it all. I believe we can but not by adhering to the presently defined way - the balanced life way. This way causes us to make choices which cut the connections within our lives, force them undercover as shown when Ann shared that her child and her family came second to the job. And when you expressed that it was hard not to have the job take precedence, but you had said yes, given your word, you would do the job as defined.

We need to find other ways for being able to say yes to both our personal and professional lives, ways which value and recognize the complexity and connectedness of both. We need not search far. Many women live life and deal with life through nurturing

connections in relations as opposed to the separation of relations, for in the separation of personal and professional lives other relations can not help but be affected.

> You could call her at school almost every Saturday, home late at night, she works late every night. I was there after school and I said to her, "How's _____?" And she said "_____, _____ who?" "In all honesty, he's resenting this, because you don't have a life."
>
> Conversation, February 3, 1993

I see us all in a dilemma of trying to separate home life and work life and discovering that such a division can not be realized yet that does not prevent us from trying to live the cover story that we and others have constructed for ourselves. Just as you shared that home life got carted with you to work, I was struggling with not having work life being taken home and our colleague was experiencing resentment. The reality is that for most women working outside of the home does not mean they are relieved of home and family responsibilities or that they give themselves permission to be relieved.

Family responsibility and how we see our roles in caring for the family is interesting in light of the research done by Shakeshaft (1987). She found that many women believe a woman could be a very good and successful administrator but also believes that the woman would still be expected to do, or be responsible for, the major portion of working at home. Fisher's (1978) work revealed that more women than men believed a woman could actually carry out both jobs (administration and the home), but few of these women surveyed indicated that two full-time jobs could be done at the same time by a woman. I believe they were saying that the enormity of carrying out both jobs and doing them well was an unachieveable goal, if women were expected and attempted to draw "the line" between their personal and professional lives. If, however, women did not

try to follow the existing stereotype, where one leaves for work and does not need to be concerned and responsible for their family until they returned from work, perhaps then they could see themselves as not only being able to, but actually doing both jobs.

Bateson (1990) describes that when making a choice "often we lose a part of life because of what we choose to retain, leaving either a home or a career to retain the other" (p. 220). But, we weren't "losing" either. We were trying to do both, to live both lives, to make no choices. We felt challenged and sometimes even helpless.

> She, of all the women, when I first spoke and shared what was happening said, I mean there was this GOOD! I need to talk.
>
> I know that last year she was going crazy because _____ was having such a difficult year, and when ____ hurts he hurts out loud, ya know, like he was, we thought, we hadn't seen him for a long time...so we dropped by and said we're here, we hope you're home...we just stopped in for a minute. ____ looked sick, physically ill,...he was grey, he was, he was, his face was sunken, he didn't smile the whole time and he just...he just said I don't even want to talk about it.
>
> _____ said to me, I need to call you, we need to go for lunch, I don't know what to do and she was so worried about him and she was hurting because he was hurting and I think she was feeling really helpless and it was just such a challenging year.
>
> Conversation November 18, 1992

The colleague of whom we spoke, had hoped to be part of our group but found the demands of home and work life did not leave time for some personal time. The first two sessions that she couldn't make she believed were coincidence, that we would be able to meet on the other dates, as shown by her note...

> Hi! I feel so badly that I'm not able to make the session tonight, I really am and I've been looking forward to meeting with you all. My life sometimes feels like it is totally beyond my control - but "do not adjust the dials sound trouble temporary!!" or something like that. Keep me in though. Thanks for calling and thinking of me! Cheers, _____

Correspondence November 1, 1992

Sadly, she never was able to join us. Just as we were trying to draw "the line" to get control over our lives, she is as well and echoes our actions by saying "do not adjust the dials". I believe we do need to examine and challenge the expectation that a line needs to be drawn. We do need to adjust the dials.

> There has been a tendency to look ahead to some sort of utopia in which women will no longer be torn by conflicting claims and desires that so often turn their pathways into zig zags or, at best, spirals. And yet these very conflicting claims are affirmations of value.
>
> Bateson (1990, p. 233)

Instead of trying to fit our lives and our ways of interacting into the existing framework which divides home and work, we need to, as Bateson states, value these claims on our lives, the multiplicity of our lives. In my letter to Beth I struggled with relations and how we try to establish and nurture them in a milieu which promotes objectivity in leadership. In our attempts to keep the distinction that separates our personal and professional lives we are creating a tension between how we perhaps would like to live our lives and how we see them as being scripted for us. There are differences between the masculine culture and the feminine culture and the scripting we encounter originates from a masculine perspective.

> When we speak of masculine culture or feminine culture, we are using a metaphor, since those are not fully developed, entirely different systems... Nevertheless, it is reasonable to speak of a distinctive sensibility a style of life, set of values, as well as activities, relationship, and cognitive and emotional predictions that are present among women but absent when men and women are together or when men are together.
>
> Lenz and Myerhoff (1985, p.7)

By valuing the conflicting claims on our lives and realizing the need to script our lives from a feminine perspective, I believe we could begin to reconstruct our cover stories, our attempts to live the life of an administrator as it is presently scripted. Instead of drawing "the line", we should draw on the wealth of our experiences and our ways as women. As Sandra Harding describes we need to theorize from our own lives. Harding refers to this kind of theorizing as "standpoint epistemology". In our conversation on February 16, 1993, we recognized that it was not just a matter of deciding to author our own stories, our own lives, but that we need to value what our stories would tell, the different ways of defining the relationship between our personal and professional lives and give ourselves permission to write them. We shared that night, that we must do this not only for ourselves but for our male colleagues.

> So, I said how are you today? And he said my wife and I talked it over and she pointed out that these are the growing years of our children and it's not so bad not being a principal because I can do that along with them. And I said gee, I'm really glad to hear that, because not many men would think that, and she's right you know. And he said oh, but she has everything organized, there's really no point that I have to be there. And I thought, oh gee...
>
> STOP! STOP!
>
> He saw my face go stone. (laughter) I just said something I shouldn't have. I just said - I just don't know of any women who would say that! (laughter) Only men have the privilege of saying that.
>
> * * * * *
>
> He asked how I was enjoying my kids this year and I said well it's not as much time as I would like. I'm not at home all the time. I said, is your wife at home and he said oh yes, I can leave with no worry at all. I thought, wouldn't that be nice to say that. What a luxury!
>
> No, we wouldn't allow ourselves to say that because you have one of the most supportive husbands that I've seen and sharing responsibilities.

Oh yeah, for sure.

But you don't give yourself permission to say those things.

No.

Men do. That's the difference. It's not just a question of the person being there because he is there.

* * * * *

Which is the real reason when I think of women, teachers on staff, who would make great administrators because their ability to organize two lives (home and work) but they say I couldn't do the job you do, the hours, etc. And then I thought I'm not showing them really what admin should be demonstrated to be.

But it's the reality.

But, yeah.

But then I think, this goes back to our other conversation about...

Is that reality or do we let it become our reality?

So what then do we do as women, what options do we have? I mean if we think that the job, that how it is defined is not appropriate for anyone be it man or woman.

And I don't think it's good for men either.

No, no.

Who knows maybe men are having that kind of conversation about themselves too.

Conversation February 16, 1993

Our ideas and thoughts are supported by Catherine Bateson (1990) when she writes that it would be easier not to write these stories, not to pen our lives but to do so would be a great neglect on our part.

She shares...

> It would be easier to live with a greater clarity of ambition, to follow goals that beckon toward a single upward progression. But perhaps what women have to offer in the world today, in which men and women both must learn to deal with new orders in complexity and rapid change, lies in the very rejection of forced choices, work or home, strength or vulnerability, caring or competition, trust or questioning. Truth may not be so simple (p. 233).

Though we may agree with Bateson that we do have much to offer, the struggle we face is shown in our conversations.

> I wonder about the myth that's out there, I mean everything we read about expectations for principals, that they do this and they do this and they do this and they do this! I wonder how real that is. I think it is a myth and if you don't live up to that myth, what you're left with is a feeling of inadequacy, that you're not doing an adequate job. You know I began to believe that that wasn't so. That that was a myth and I think a very harmful one. You know all that stuff you read about the principal setting the tone, do all these wonderful things...
>
> And all these initiatives.
>
> Somehow, yes all those initiatives and somehow you're left wondering how, when do they do all these things?
>
> You're wondering if they're married.
>
> When do they look after their families.
>
> I think it's a myth, a harmful one and you're left feeling so guilty and you're afraid to voice that.
>
> Don't you think so?
>
> Yes, but how do we dispel that myth?
>
> Conversation February 16, 1993
>
> But we're working in a male organization.
>
> Yes we are, I think we are.
>
> Aren't we, we are working very definitely in a male dominated organization, a hierarchical one, I mean it's structured as men structure

> their organizations, so as women, I mean, we live within it, we work within it, we try to make things work for ourselves even though there are...can we change anything? Can we make it different? I don't know.
>
> More to what you'd do naturally, as opposed to, like maybe you wouldn't be the principal, uh, a shared leadership.
>
> Maybe, I don't know...or maybe, I wouldn't do my budget with GOALS and it's set out there and we're going to meet by going straight at them because that's not the way the world works. That's not the way my school usually worked. I don't know.
>
> It's a good question.
>
> (silence as each of us thought about the possibilities)
>
> Conversation January 19, 1993

Our conversations show our concern about how the administrative job has been defined, the demands made on one not only professionally and personally and the uncertainty surrounding how one can influence and promote change. The phrase "what you'd do naturally" may be a way of dispelling the myth we see existing about how we must separate our personal and professional lives.

Women tend to establish circles of support, situations which provide children with caring environments. The onset of schooling, however, often finds these circles broken or fractured in some way though it is not the intention of the teacher to do so, not by any means.

However, in school children often find themselves defined and judged as "separate" entities, not as one connected and in relation with others.

> The contrast between a self defined through separation and a self delineated through connection, between a self measured against an abstract ideal of perfection and a self assessed through particular activities of care, becomes clearer and the implications of this contrast extend by

> considering the different ways these children resolve a conflict between responsibility to others and responsibility to self.
>
> Gilligan (1982, p. 35)

How we nurture children in their development of concept of "self" and how they relate with others may shed light on why so much attention is given to discipline and class management.

As well there is the separation of home from school through the assignment to each institution of what each is primarily responsible for teaching the children. Noddings (1984) suggests that though the line is not hard and fast it is generally acknowledged in our society that "the school trains the intelligence, and the home and church train for morality and emotional well-being". I believe we do this so as to make the task of raising and educating children seem to be a management task and clearly objective. Each institution knows its jobs and can proceed with it. I see the practice of separating and balancing one's personal and professional life rooted in this assignment of roles to institutions. It perpetuates the idea of control and objectivity at the organizational level by bringing it to the individual level. And the separation now has become the knowledge that is the standard of judging. Noddings (1984) states that this view must be rejected emphatically. She goes on to say that even though each function can be discussed separately at the theoretical level we can not, must not, separate them in the daily living of our lives. I see our dilemma again here, where we are inclined to live connected relational lives at the personal level but our work setting does not promote such connections.

This separation between the personal and professional aspects of our lives, where the goal is to achieve objectivity in the work place, schools for us, has implications with respect to the devaluing of mothering. Sara Freedman's words caused me to reflect very carefully about ways to live my personal and professional lives, so that I should perhaps more correctly say "my personal and professional life". She states

> Ironically, it is just those professions (such as teaching) that have historically been rooted in nurturing that have the potential to devalue mothering further, or at least to provide a powerful ideological push to its social degradation. By forcefully attempting to distance itself from its roots in female-identified nurturance, and by positioning the idea that one can take care of children in a "professional" - that is detached and objective manner, teaching would become one more career that undermines those jobs, and people who do perform a care giving role (p. 245).

Flora. Her words struck my soul and made me certain, so very certain, that we must not entertain the idea of separating our personal and professional lives as women. In our jobs as women principals, if we objectify our "roles", if we do not honour and value the connections between our personal and professional lives, those connections, circles of caring and nurturing, it will be ourselves who are barriers to the creating of school communities based on an ethic of care.

Sergiovanni (1992) asks very different questions about schools from the ones he earlier raised with respect to school leadership, questions such as "should schools be understood as formal organizations or as communities?" (p. 41). He states that "Both the organization and the community metaphor ring true...but it makes a world of difference which of the two provides the overarching frame" (p. 42).

He writes of schools created around the concept of community and writes that such a frame will change how we perceive leadership. I believe that if we approach

schools from a community-building metaphor, we would not feel compelled to separate our personal and professional lives. There would be a greater degree of harmony between how we behave in both areas of life. By changing how our professional lives are lived, supporting the beliefs of community, of circles of support in schools, we could realize, for both women and men, a time when "job doesn't have to take precedence over family".

Another dilemma we face is that of living and acting according to the expectations and limitations of the experiences we have had which have shaped our understanding of leadership. Though we identify alternative definitions of leadership which address the existence of the sense of separation between the personal and professional, we are susceptible to acting as we have originally been taught about how leaders behave.

> At school if I'm having a rough day, people don't know that generally, well with him it was different...he was going around with a sad face and ya know you'd say hi to him and he'd say he (barely audible) and I just said to him "Look, regardless of how you're feeling you have to be positive, you have to be up because your role is to buoy everyone else up".
>
> Or else, say, I'm feeling really down but I'm going...
>
> I'm doing this about it.
>
> Getting on with it.
>
> Well, I shared that with him as well and, and I talked about just being really positive no matter how bad you're feeling, you, you can come in and talk to me about it, how bad you're feeling and all this but you don't let any one else on staff know that.
>
> And, and we talked about level of commitment and I said to him too that you have to make a decision here and then he said not only was he in crisis and I talked about being positive and being committed and all of those things and he said I want you to know, if, if I'm not successful in this job I know I can be successful in some place else so if I can't turn this around, I will leave quietly. And I said give me a break. You know this, I'm saying to you, be positive, be committed and you're saying, you're telling me that...you've given up.

But here's an interesting scenario, he's doing something that we said often, back to our conversation about parents, commitment to your family. I, along with you two, I know when I went back to work, I made sure there was a nanny and everything, but job did take precedence.

It's hard not to.

Uh, uh.

It really is. You feel like, I've accepted it, I've said I'll do it.

I'll do it.

It isn't an eight to four job.

No.

So when I say yes, I mean yes.

But I wonder if we draw a line anywhere that, saying that I have done this and more and now my family does take precedence.

I don't think, I know I didn't.

I don't either.

And I keep going and sometimes I wonder if I've erred in making some of those positions.

Sure.

Yeah.

I think we all question our decisions.

So he's making these decisions.

He's drawing that line. I mean he drew that line before he came to the job.

Yeah, pre-defining it.

What was he willing to commit?

> Pre-defining, pre-defining, which is interesting, rather than negotiating it along the way, working it out and saying I need this time now or I don't need it now...
>
> Conversation December 2, 1992

In this conversation we have a colleague who is trying to meet the needs of both his family and his work. He is dealing with them separately and both are suffering. His strategy was one of drawing a line and he was having difficulty when one part of his life spilled over into the other. There is frustration for us in that he draws a line and I believe we are saying we had to make the commitment to work and, therefore, so should he. We, in a way, expect him to live the same cover story we have, separating our personal and professional lives and making it seem as though everything works out. But, we are not fully entrapped by this notion of separation.

We focus on an important aspect of the situation and that is our colleague's pre-defining of his line rather than negotiating it, talking it over, trying to see other ways of meeting his needs. In doing so, talking it over, the chance would exist for his line to be less rigid, a line which would curve and connect his life at home and work so one need not be sacrificed for the other. I believe this was an important time for us in that we had talked about what other ways exist for making sense in both our personal and professional lives and when a situation arises we know we need to be wary of falling into the already existing job descriptions and need to talk about the options available for us, and for those with whom we work.

Edson (1988) found that women who strive to succeed and reject traditional gender roles by balancing both career and family experience feelings of guilt due to the

pressure to balance both the personal and professional aspects of their lives. Again, I return to how we define our professional life by separating it from our personal life.

Flora, it strikes me as strange, that though I have shared with you the notion that achieving balance is simplistic and not representative of our lives there still remain for me the questions of "does balance enter into our lives?", and if so, "where does it?". Perhaps it is due in part to our conversation about responsibility.

> It's that whole sense of saying how many things can I take on right now and what's the gain for the school and the kids and taking those things on and giving yourself permission not to worry about the others. And that's what we have difficulty with, those things we aren't doing nag at us. But to be able to say, I'm consciously making a decision on this right now, give yourself permission not to do everything...
>
> And yet we always want to own so much.
>
> That's the problem, she's got it. You know, I think that's part of it.
>
> Here I was. I met today with a teacher having some trouble and she said one of the things is she doesn't feel she has enough time to prepare for her French class so I said I'll take supervision for you that one day a week, which I really don't mind doing, but you know you take on and then you think well...
>
> I'll relieve you and I'll relieve you, etc., etc. and the truth is whose responsibility is it?
>
> Conversation February 3, 1992

You shared your belief that we as women "always want to own so much". Our need or the expectation that we do all the caring and nurturing because it is our role, our job. Nel Noddings' words tell us that "women often define themselves as both persons and moral agents in terms of their capacity to care" (p. 40). Perhaps our conversation tells us that we are trying to do all the caring, as in other conversations when we tell ourselves we must always be "up" so as to keep our teachers' spirits high and healthy. If our roles

are, and I believe they are, defined quite objectively, it may be our way of compensating for the lack of caring embodied within the definition of the "role" of an administrator. If we are viewed as being the objective, rational leaders, we may then be counteracting this image by "over-caring". This over-caring may be a way for us to establish a closer match between how we live our personal lives with that of our professional lives, but it is draining. Nel Noddings again helps me to understand how we can improve our caring.

> The one-caring comes across to the cared-for in an attitude. Whatever she does, she conveys to the cared for that she cares... She is present to the cared-for. Her attitude is one of receptivity. But there is a receptivity required of the cared-for also (p. 59).

I believe we need to re-examine what we meant by "responsibility" within the caring act and focus on the notion of receptivity. If we see our roles as being the one who is primarily responsible for care we may, though maybe unknowingly, not be allowing or fostering an ethic of caring. By trying to develop a state of receptivity, not to be confused with reciprocity, we can in time help to create a community where we are not viewed as the primary care-giver because of our position. A school community in which an atmosphere of receptivity exists will enable more people to care and to be cared for. I believe this would close the gap between our personal and professional lives and how we try to live them as "one-in-the-same". We would not then be burdened with the belief that caring can be objectively defined as a responsibility.

> The one-caring has one great aim: to preserve and enhance caring in herself and in those with whom she comes in contact. This quite naturally becomes the first aim of parenting and of education. It is an aim that is build into the process itself - not one that lies somewhere beyond it. Everything that is proposed as part of education is examined in its light. That which diminishes it is rejected, that which casts doubt on its maintenance is postponed, and that which enhances it is embraced.

Nel Noddings (1984, p. 173)

Our separation of personal and professional in our lives serves to diminish caring, our attempts to bring the two together need to be embraced.

> Now I'm wondering about working as hard and thinking that I'd be recognized like my colleagues, my male colleagues and what not but I don't think it's recognition that women are looking for as much as can you look at our lives and maybe can jobs and careers recognize our point of view.
>
> Yes, our point of view may be different, we have a different way of doing things, we have a different perspective on things!
>
> Wouldn't it be helpful to do that, for everyone?

Conversation February 16, 1993

There are so many questions to ask.

Linda

A LETTER TO ANN

Dear Ann:

Though I am writing this letter after the other letters, I feel I have been composing it all the while as I wrote the others. In fact, I could not have written this letter before any of the other letters because it is the link between them all. It tells of the undercurrent of our times together and I believe of the main story line which finally emerged and connected us. It could not have been written sooner as it was constructed by the other letters and the journeys we took through our conversations before we spoke of and told this part of our stories.

> ...Things that I'm, for one, that I'm really reflecting upon is, is the male role as administrator different from the female role? Because to me, I've seen some differences that are inexplicable and yet I'm, I don't have any other knowledge to base, to determine if I'm generalizing...
>
> Conversation December 2, 1992

You put it right on the table. You posed a question which spoke of your way as a woman of knowing and of your knowledge for knowing and understanding. In my letters I've shared our conversations about "Becoming Principals", "Relationships" and "Our Personal and Professional Lives". Each one was rich with women's stories yet, at the same time, we had not discussed gender specifically. It was there all the time but was always buried or masked in some way. It appears that we had to tell the other stories so we could share our gender stories. I wonder why. We may have been still establishing a trust in our group where we felt we could share our experiences in our gendered world. We may not have known or awakened to our gender stories because of the male-dominated culture we live within and our own identification - knowing of ourselves from a male

perspective. In our very first time together we spoke about gender issues as related to girls, not to ourselves.

> One of the women was talking about her little girl...who is only four and one half years and attends I don't know either a kindergarten or playschool anyway she comes home and she talks about the fact that the little boys are pushing her and she doesn't like the little boys pushing her, and _____ was saying that she's, it's harassment, not sexual harassment but it's...
>
> Picking on...
>
> Yes, harassment.
>
> And she says she wants her little girl to learn to have a strong voice, to be able to say no but...we went around that whole issue and I thought about...it's a real dilemma when I watch the little kids out on the grounds and I watch little boys and little girls on the grounds, they are very physical with one another. It seems to be the nature of little people.
>
> Yes they are physical.
>
> Uh, uh. Little pups!
>
> They're rolling around, they're playing with each other, they're chasing each other that just seems to be the natural way they play.
>
> And part of it is healthy, natural play.
>
> Yes. How they learn. My own _____ is _____ years old and my husband I were laughing because he sits on the vanity when we're getting ready for work and puts on, pretends to put on lipstick like me, and after shave like _____. Isn't it interesting at this age it's modelling anybody, significant people right. At what point does he distinguish and say I do the things my dad does, I don't do the things my mom does in that context, you know.
>
> Or, certain things my mom does.
>
> Yeah.
>
> See that's interesting because I've talked about my grandchildren. I have a granddaughter and two grandsons and the little boys are different little people, I'm watching them with great curiosity because...

Right from the beginning different?

They seem to be, to me. They seem to be. Well I don't know if right from the beginning, when they were babies if they were like that, but as they grow...now that they are toddlers they are different.

From the little girl.

Yes. They strut. I was telling _____ their shoulders go back and they kind of puff out their little chests and they kind of strut and I don't know, I don't remember the girls doing that. They move around a whole lot more...

But your little one...

Yeah, he says "me stompin mom" and he does. He's physical, not aggressive but very physical in the way he lives in his own world.

I'm wondering if we don't culture that out of girls. Um, my two daughters, I remember saying if these are strong people I want them strong decision makers.

Independent.

Yes, I wanted them independent and it sort of got thrown back in my lap when they were about 16 and 20 and I was lamenting they weren't going down the path I had chosen, you know university education, and the 16 year old said to me "Mom, all these years you've never said we had to go to school. You said you wanted strong independent responsible people and we are." And I had to, yes, I did achieve my goal...

Well, like ____, has come home from kindergarten and said and he has never spoken this way, but he say, "the girls can't play with us" or "the girls won't let us play" but there's this division, they're been in school all of what, five weeks, and he comes home talking about the girls won't let me play in the house centre, they always pick the girls to play in the house centre.

And the girls won't play in the block centre.

It's interesting to look at it from the schooling aspect. Do we want the girls to be more like the boys, assertive, independent and strong or the boys to be more gentle, more understanding and less aggressive in their strength?

Yes, right.

But here we talked about wanting our girls to be independent. I remember that in bringing up my girls, that's what I wanted above all else. I wanted them to be independent, able to cope, able to manage in this world, independent people. That was very important to me. I don't remember valuing the...

being demure? or being...

the female...

Yes, that's right I'm wondering if we push that for survival for them.

Well, I don't remember doing that...

For coping.

Yes, I think I saw that as part of their need to be able to cope. I also saw it as being desirable. That's what's interesting. I saw that as being very desirable.

Yes

Um, um

Uh, uh.

Conversation October 14, 1992

Though we spoke of young girls, daughters and granddaughter, we told some of our woman stories by sharing what we believed to be desirable to nurture in our girls. We were, as Gilligan (1982) states, showing "how accustomed we have become to seeing life through men's eyes" (p. 6) and choosing to help our daughters acquire the characteristics of males. We also shared that it is very important for our boys to have female traits but it was absolutely critical for the girls to have the male qualities so they could cope. We were valuing the male qualities, perhaps because of our experiences in a male-biased

society. A dilemma exists for us when you consider Chodorow's work in describing female development from a positive perspective as opposed to the negative perspective of Freud. She suggested that girls' gender identification occurs within a context that nurtures the feelings of connectedness and relationships because of the interaction between the mother and daughter being "like" as opposed to "different". She believes that this context of experiencing likeness in developmental relationships causes girls to develop a sense of "empathy" embodied within their primary definition of self, a sense that is not cultivated with boys. The dilemma is what message are we giving our daughters when we foster and promote male qualities which speak of "separation from" more than "empathy with"?

What did we experience as girls for us to value and desire what we do for our daughters? What have we experienced as women which has perpetuated our values and desires?

> I know that in the past when you think about women who have become professionally predominant within their profession, they have had to, they have had to play the male role in order to achieve the male position, right?
>
> I think that's changing, that they've had to be better than the male.
>
> Yes, yes, and ...
>
> That they've had to be better than the males and show that they were just as good...
>
> Women administrators?
>
> In any profession.
>
> The women have had to be more male than the men...
>
> Certainly when I started, absolutely!

...in order to achieve a position. And I think that that's when I think that's intuitively recognized by other women.

Intuitively recognized?

Oh, you think that that's what happened?

Yes, yes and they sort of feel you've crossed over...

Left the fold, whatever.

Is that right?

I think...well um, yes. Yes, that's one of my hypotheses. Because, I see lots of women being appointed administrators in our profession anyways, principalships now that I would never even look at them and say, they've, they've had to be male in order to achieve their position.

No, right. It's different now but it wasn't when I started.

No, for sure.

Conversation January 19, 1993

When we discussed "playing the male role in order to achieve the position" we seemed to dismiss the phenomenon as now being in the past, that it no longer is necessary for women to do that. I don't know, however, if that is so. Grant (1985) suggests that a high price has been paid by women on their entry into male dominated organizations. She contends that the price extracted from women has been for them to "publicly reject and submerge their definition of self as women" (p. 113). She believes women have had to do so because our ways of knowing, our subjective experiences, are not regarded as valid knowledge. Though we seemed quick to dismiss the scenario of "playing the game" perhaps we did so in haste. Was it a story we weren't ready to share or did we not see ourselves as authoring it?

I find it, really difficult to be able to, to be able to admit to my, to my associate or who ever that I can't do this job.

Yes.

I find that really, really difficult. And it's not a question, I know I can do the job but the expectations for how I do the job, I cannot sustain it.

Well I think we have to begin to stand up and say - We're doing a good job, we're really effective principals, and what you're asking, what you're saying is not real, or something. Like I think we swallow a lot of stuff and we internalize it.

Yeah, know how may times have I sat at a meeting and thought, I don't manage that that way so therefore there must be something wrong with me!

Ah, ah.

A lot.

Yeah. (laughter)

And it's really...

And ya now, the more I get angry when I think of the number of times I've done that.

You know what else I find, is that I hear very few of my female colleagues speaking up at these meetings about deadlines and various things. I hear male colleagues doing that increasingly more um, but I mean every female administrator that I talk to is just overwhelmed...

Swamped.

...by the job. And I'm wondering why is that, why are we not, why are we not saying something.

Because we're afraid that they're going to say it's the women therefore you can't do the job. We're women who've come into this job, who've wanted it, so do it ladies! And don't make excuses.

Yeah.

That's for sure.

I think that's what we're afraid of.

Well isn't that what we've been told for a long, long time.

Yeah, I mean, you've fought to get in, now you're in, so do it!

Yeah, play the game this way.

And don't complain. And I think we may do it differently in the school.

But we still play the game overall.

Yeah, you better believe it.

And I think maybe sometimes how we do it in the schools like when that one person said oh a woman's touch in the school or whatever.

We think that's a put down, we don't think it's a compliment.

Conversation February 16, 1993

Ann, one month after we had put aside the notion of "playing the game" it was back in our conversation - this time we were players. Maybe in becoming principals we didn't perceive ourselves as having to emulate the male administrative model, yet our conversation that evening in February revealed that we were in some ways submerging ourselves and were angry with ourselves for our actions, or better stated, our "inactions".

Fear enters into our stories. Now that we're in how will we be judged?

Regardless of the 'appropriateness' of leadership style adapted by females, female leaders are judged differently by their colleagues and subordinates from me in like situations.

Blackmore (1989, p. 118)

We expected that we would be judged in our work as our male colleagues are but inherent in that expectation is a denouncement on our part of what we bring to the job that is different than most of our colleagues. We shouldn't expect nor even desire to be

evaluated in the same way if the measurement tool used does not recognize what we bring to the job. Blackmore (1989) states that a woman's competence is judged in two ways. Firstly, competence is determined according to the task and whether it is considered to be a masculine or feminine task. She states that success by a woman in a masculine task is often attributed to luck as opposed to competence. This is, in part, due to the second standard of judgement which is the legitimacy of the person in the role they occupy. Most administrative roles, defined in masculine terms, suggest that a male should perform the role, thereby negating the legitimacy of a woman even performing the role in the first place.

In our role of administrator, we were in various degrees "playing the game". In such situations Miller (1986) believes that what may work the best for a woman is to give the impression that she is carrying out the role as defined and expected, yet, at the same time, being aware of their own needs and managing to meet them. She refers to this style as being that of the "smart woman". However, she points out that operating in this manner promotes deception and manipulation within the relationship. I believe that women who find themselves in relationships such as this have to contend not only with the deception and manipulation of the other person but with the deception and manipulation of themselves. This is even more critical for them. What I see happening is that the woman is living her leadership in a way which emphasizes control, individualism and power over others. In doing so, she is supporting the existence of dominant/subordinate relationships where the accent on male-defined characteristics relegates female-defined characteristics to a lesser valued status. Personally the woman may experience a feeling of dissonance within herself. She is living her job, perhaps even her life, in a way that does

not fit or feel right for her. In essence she is working along accentuating the individual. What is being submerged is women's approach to relationships in which we,

> ...step into, out back, from, situations, to see and respond to others in their own particular situations and contexts, rather than to challenge them.
>
> Lyons (1990, p. 169)

By being the "smart woman" we are not seeking to make meaning in our way, through connecting and establishing caring relationships. I believe that when we reject or do not value our female traits, we run the risk of separating not only from others but from our very selves.

> I am not naturally alone. I am naturally in a relation from which I derive nourishment and guidance. When I am alone, either because I have detached myself or because circumstances have wrenched me free, I seek first and most naturally to reestablish my relatedness. My very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality.
>
> Noddings (1984, p. 51)

As we identify with our "basic reality' we keep bumping up against the reality that surrounds us and which does not recognize a woman's reality as of equal value, one which should be afforded the same honour and respect the dominant reality is given. In acknowledging a living according to our basic reality, we discover the many differences that exist between the two.

> This is the first time, really, that I have been in a role when I've had a male under me, and I mean that as the organization is laid out. I hired _____ for a position and I had no prior knowledge of him but certainly out of the candidates that I interviewed, I felt most comfortable with him. And, ah, I thought yes! This is someone I think that, that I can work well with and I think will be a real asset to the school. But there...well when we started working together there were little nuances that perplexed me. Things that weren't, you know...

I couldn't really put a handle on it, what is this, what's different here? And, and I still don't know if it's, if it's just him ya know...or if it's me.

Uh uh, uh uh.

I still don't know that, but little things like and some of them are going to sound silly, but he called me "boss".

Umm.

I would never call my boss "boss".

I don't think that sounds silly.

I would never do that. I think it's condescending. I don't think it, it builds me up. It certainly doesn't build me up in my eyes and I don't think it builds me up in his eyes. When he was very new on staff before the teachers came back, he made a couple of decisions totally without me.

Uh uh.

Not major things, it's just that...

He didn't tell you he had done it.

He didn't consult me. You know we hadn't made that decision yet, who was going to do what, he just, he just did it. Again, something I would never have dreamed of doing. Then ah, I don't know - little things like...considering each other's schedules. I have a family that I would like to spend them with. We need to talk in terms of flexibility, of when we can work together.

Did he hear what you were saying?

He did, but he was upset and so was I. The next day, and again I don't know if this is a woman thing or not but I went in and said _____ ya know I really felt badly about our meeting last night but there were things I needed to say and I, I don't regret having said them, but I also said them in emotion and that's what I regret more than anything. That I was upset when I talked to you and that may, that may have had more significance than whaat I was saying. How I was saying might have come through louder than what I was saying. So I regretted that. And it's an interesting thing _____ when you say, you said it out of emotion, but it was important and you know it's interesting and I wonder if anyone, male or female, would have heard it differently if you had sat down and said it monotone,

in a very objective way. Like I have apologized for my emotion too, in getting...and then I thought why am I...I think maybe it is a female trait but I'm trying not to make excuses for it.

Um um.

Conversation December 2, 1992

This conversation raised the idea of relationships, how one works with other people. The word "Boss" did not capture what the relationship was hoped to be, one of working together, talking about ideas and decisions. There was also a desire for the relationship to be developed with a sensitivity to the needs of each person, being flexible in how and when work would be done. Though there was an attempt to share leadership, to collaborate, the sense of organization, of hierarchy, of "Boss", seemed to dictate how the relationship would be structured.

> In educational administration, as in organizational theory, the dominance of a science of administration has legitimated power relations in schools and maintained a myth of bureaucratic rationality and individualism...
>
> Blackmore (1989)

It's that whole hierarchal thing. He mandates it and you have to do it because he said. And surely there's another way, it might be you can imagine him negotiating and saying, you know, I need this, it's his needs, not yours, you know you'll get it done.

That's what you did when you asked for report cards. You gave staff, you didn't say I need them now, you said I'll need them. When can you bring them? Whenever you're ready, put them in my box...here are the parameters. So it seems to me that is a woman's issue. Because I think women tend to negotiate more like that.

Uh, uh.

He could surely do that, that would be a great help.

But even thought it's a woman's issue you don't need to dress it up (laughter) like a woman's issue, I think a lot of men...I know what you're

saying. But I wonder if you could get it in faster by saying "we" all, I don't know, but it is I think how we operate, that way.

I think more men would see it as, he's my boss, he says I have to do it this way and I'm not going to make a gib...I don't know, maybe I'm wrong.

No, you're not, I concede on that one...

I always negotiate with my staff. Like I need to see you as soon as I can.

See, that's why I think it's a woman's issue. I do think that the majority, not all men or all women but I think that they operate on a hierarchical power basis.

Well we had this talk about team and team to men often means to one captain rules and the captain says and you just do it, you do the play whereas to women the word team means...

You consult, you negotiate.

Yes, you negotiate.

And this one woman said, now I know why, as a kid, they never picked me. I always wanted to talk about what positions people played instead of doing it.

She wanted to negotiate. (laughter)

Conversation February 16, 1993

Hierarchy, the basis for organization in schools, is itself another word for domination. Structures and organizations based on a hierarchical premise do not allow for alternate forms of organization to occur, ways which may more accurately reflect how women organize.

She's talking about how women often create different types of organizations in, in, not schools, she's in business but they really work on circles and you don't have that hierarchy. You work on connecting circles and you try and develop that. And what makes me laugh about it is that she was talking about this to a grad class of hers and they were all nodding, saying that seems very humane and respectful of everyone and leadership is dispersed and that you're not always making the one

authoritarian type decision. And then a fellow put his hand up and said how do you claw your way to the centre of the circle? (laughter)

She said - no you missed the point, you missed the point. And I think that's in how we work. Like when you had facilitator meetings. That's very different than a lot of schools. And that is dispersing the responsibility for input anyways.

Um, uh uh.

Yes, uh, uh.

Taking responsibility for discussion.

So...

Didn't always like what came out of them but...

That's the risk.

The risk you take if you really mean, if you want that to work collaboratively and you want the input.

I can't imagine leading without that input though.

It's too lonely. It's too scary. I don't know.

To do it without the input.

Yeah.

And yet for every...

There's so much expertise out there, in your school. Yet you know you have to make the ultimate decision, there's some tough ones that you have to call yourself and your staff expect you do to that. And you know that you have to do that.

And yet for every generalization you make, you can think of numerous women who work like men, where they don't ask for input and they enforce their opinions.

That's right.

Ah, ah.

Yes. It's not just a gender thing.

And men who...you know as we talked about that circle thing I was thinking of male principals I know who had, well I'd call it support circles, I'm sure they'd call it teams or something but teams within their staff where they had different responsibilities and they worked together as a connected group. I wonder too, I mean I think...

It's not a gender thing, like style maybe.

Conversation February 3, 1993

In our conversation we acknowledge the importance of recognizing the expertise of the people you work with and not administering alone as the one authority. We recognize that there is a time when a decision has to be made but of equal importance to making the decision is the process of the coming to the decision. Through connecting and linking with people, a different portrayal of leadership is given, one that accentuates the importance of relations and equality within them. Leadership lived in such a way does not have those in such positions shy away from making decisions and acting in what could be seen as a powerful way. Rather the process, by which the decision is arrived at, has given power to the person making the decision in that the involvement of many in helping arrive at the decision should ensure it serves the community well. The participation of people allows for the scrutiny of the leader in the final decision making act and what follows as a result.

Harstock captures the essence of what we were saying in terms of how we try to provide leadership, that is, "to lead is to be at the centre of the group rather than in front of the others" (1983, p.8). She states that when in a position of power, because of one's knowledge and skill, a leader must be held accountable and responsible to those in the community and in a meaningful way. We acknowledge that having input from teachers we

work with is absolutely necessary because of their "practical knowledge" but that with collaboration also comes the risk of what results from it. There may be some directions taken that, if we ourselves had made the decision, we would not have chosen. However, as long as a caring decision is made for the community, leading from the centre is very desirable. Leading from the centre of a group as opposed to the top of the hierarchy presents a challenge for us as women because it is a different way, a way usually perceived as a deficient way. This perception may have its roots in dominant and subordinate traditions where difference means deficiency (Miller, 1986). As women when we do live our leadership differently, we often discover that where we anticipated or hoped there would be support and understanding, even appreciation for our approach, we find just the opposite.

> I thought, ya know, something is getting in the way of me being able to support this person it's just, it's for whatever reason it's just not working...
>
> I thought I've got to address this issue, so I laid that on the table. I said look I really want to support you and assist you here, but I just feel that, that I'm not getting through here, that there's some barrier, that, and she said yes, there is, you scare me to death. And I couldn't, I mean I was really taken aback by this. So I thought, well, why would she have these perceptions? Because I don't see myself as a scary person, on the other hand I know I'm forthright, I'm totally up front and I guess what she was seeing was, I was getting close, but we needed to deal with this or I'm not able to help her but...You start doubting yourself...
>
> Uh, uh.
>
> I know you do...
>
> How am I dealing with these people. how I'm coming across...
>
> But maybe that's a woman thing too, that somebody says something to us and we take it really personally, and we live with it for a really long time and we keep asking ourselves that question. I wonder if male principals

do that or if they just deal with it, dismiss it, whatever, I don't know if they carry it around with them.

As baggage.

Yes, and yet I think that when someone says something you really think about it for a long time. I wonder if that's for everybody, or what.

Conversation December 2, 1992

You shared Ann, how you were trying to establish a relationship with a teacher in order to help her. Her response to you surprised you because you saw your behaviour as being that of good will, support and caring. She may have been viewing you through lenses which had not seen administrators behave in that way. She didn't know you well. Trust enters in here as well. But I believe probably what concerned her the most was your seeking of a relationship. Administrators working in hierarchical organizations, such as in our schools, often deal with teachers as subordinates, where teachers are more likely to be evaluated and criticized rather than evaluated and supported in their growth. Teachers are often in situations where they are controlled, an experience which has not been conductive to mutual benefit (Rizvi, 1986). They are accustomed to relationships which are one-sided and defined by separation from administration rather than collaboration with.

But sometimes the people you have the most difficulty with are other women not men. I mean there are times when in any sense of being perceived as being successful I think sometimes women colleagues have as much difficulty with that as men colleagues.

Yes.

Ah, ah.

I remember my first year teaching when _____ was appointed principal. I remember female staff members saying I've never worked for a woman and I never want to!

Ah, uh.

I think that that attitude is still there.

And those were the female teachers.

Yes.

Um, um.

Sometimes we do ourselves a disservice like that.

Why do you think that is? Why do women have that sense?

Why wouldn't you work for a woman? Isn't it the capabilities of the individual? Male or female?

But you know what's interesting too is we ask ourselves what have I done?

Maybe it's her problem.

Yes.

Exactly.

Like, why is she like that?

Why do we do that to each other? We have enough other obstacles to deal with, you know.

Oh, isn't that true.

Ah, ah.

I must say that most of the challenges in this school, that I've faced, have come from females.

Even considering that more women teach in percentage male to female.

Yes, more still from female teachers. But even those who don't necessarily agree with me and can say that they don't confront in public generally.

The males?

Yes, the males don't.

Well right. And I would say that's true. The most challenging staff members that I've had are females um, but I've attributed it to the fact that they care deeply about what they do and that the man that I've, I can honestly say, that of the men I've worked with the staff members on staffs at schools I've been principal of, I haven't found that same passion about what they do.

Ah, ah.

And, and so there's a, oh well, we'll go with the flow, we'll do this.

She'll be gone soon.

Yeah, she'll be gone soon or I'll do my thing anyway. That kind of attitude.

Yes, yeah that's perhaps.

Conversation February 3, 1993

Our conversation here speaks of women in transition. I believe that the women from whom we experience scorn or rejection may be experiencing anger and jealousy in that they haven't been able to pursue careers like we have. Here I believe it is very important that we continue to lead from the centre in order to provide opportunities for women to assume leadership roles that would not be afforded to them within a hierarchical model.

In thinking of women in transition, that is, one of reclaiming female ways, I was also able to understand the conflict, between women teachers and women administrators in a different way. Though some women may want the status quo to continue, some women who openly confront us are actually being allowed to speak up, speak out,

something that may not have been possible before. This conflict stems from what we called "the passion" that the female teacher spoke with and had for her work. Sharing our passions increases the opportunities for us to begin to know one another and to work towards establishing relationships which in turn assist us in how we organize our schools and define education.

We are not only living our leadership in a different way, through relations, we also are creating different physical surroundings as a consequence in schools.

> You know, I wonder about, because I've had that experience too, about people thinking oh, there's a woman coming. Like the plague is coming.
>
> From parents as well?
>
> Um, yeah, but they said after a whole, gee it really has worked out (laughter) and I said what has worked out and they said having a woman as principal. (laughter)
>
> Actually one staff member said, you won't want me to tell you this but there had been someone out and they had been to the school before and we had made some changes. The staff room looked like a ghetto before, I mean we had furniture from forty years ago and all, all we did was buy new furniture so it looked comfortable and the comment from this person was gee it has a woman's touch. And I thought, no it's not a woman's touch, it's just a new couch and chair and something for staff to have a place to go to. And then I started thinking about perhaps there is something different in how a woman works in a school. I don't know.
>
> Yeah, I think there is.
>
> Yes, I do too.
>
> That's a generalization, but I believe there are subtle differences. And, and that's...
>
> I think that social, and environment overall, would be more important to a woman.
>
> The culture and the environment.

Of the school overall.

Uh uh. And ya know is your office inviting and do parents feel comfortable there and do you have toys for their kids to play with when they come in. I don't know if all men consider those as factors. I think some certainly do, representatively though I don't know. I do think there is somewhat of a difference.

I think sometimes, what people would share with me is, one parent asked would you talk this long with all parents and they were school shopping. It just happened that we did have a long conversation but they were very, it was a good conversation and I said, yes. If the parent is here to talk that's what we're, that's my job. And he was amazed and he said usually they just tell you this and uh you set the appointment and whatever. So I think we are, we deal different, than historically how schools have dealt with and I think male colleagues sometimes now deal as we would but not the majority possibly, because there still is a tradition of what a principal is about.

Yeah.

And leadership style.

I think the other thing that staff have said to me that they find different in a woman those who have experienced both is a sensitivity towards them. You know. If you're away for a day...oh how are you feeling today. That they acknowledge those types of things.

Greet them with a smile in the morning when they come to the door.

And again, that's a generalization there are certainly some men that do that and I think more all the time are being more sensitive.

Yes.

Um, uh.

But I do think those things are different. Um having a staff meeting and making sure or, or a meeting that you call and making sure there is food there. You know, those little touches that you know how people work and they work better if their stomach is full and they're feeling satisfied - all of those things.

Conversation February 3, 1993

Again, our conversation speaks about relations, making schools inviting for teachers, students and parents. By "opening up" and extending invitations, trying to make people feel comfortable and welcome, we are altering the essence of a school.

In our attempts to establish relationships with our colleagues in school, our conversations had us wondering about the relationships we established with the other women in administration.

> I think the difficulty is that we as women do not support one another.
>
> No.
>
> No, we don't.
>
> Just like, I was going to say, just, just, here we are, we've got together but how often have we done this? Like it's because Linda's writing a thesis so we got together.
>
> No, but that's so true.
>
> It's true!
>
> Yes.
>
> Like and I would talk but wouldn't get together regularly and talk and I would talk with _____ and we were both in the same group and I think that's it.
>
> That helped sustain you.
>
> Yep! But why didn't I do that before?
>
> Because it's not viewed as being the job and I think we are modelling ourselves as its been.
>
> Conversation February 16, 1993

Again, we encounter the definition of the job, how it is expected to be carried out and our acceptance of that definition. Shakeshaft (1991) explains our predicament as

resulting from administrative roles being based on a male perspective. She states that most theory and practice is organizational and administrative thought has been arrived at by knowing and understanding the behaviours of males. Women do not engage or behave in the same way as men, and existing theories only explain how women do not experience the world as defined by men, rather than showing how women make meaning according to the ways of women. She states that the

> ...knowledge base in educational administration and organizational theory is inadequate in every category as a conceptual foundation for understanding and informing practice in organizations...Women, as but one of the non-dominant groups, have been unrepresented from the production of knowledge, standards and norms" (p. 2, 1991).

> There are strategies for supporting women in conversation. What often happens I think back what happened to _____ who is I think is one of the best administrators.

> Yeah, they roll in their um...

> Yeah, before she started, the sighs and the rudeness.

> What group was this?

> In our meetings.

> She was very vocal, she had a particular point of view and she was very articulate.

> She didn't whine.

> No. It was well said and I think she worked at presenting it in a more male way. But there would be their rolling of the eyes and...

> And I remember that one guy who would sigh loudly, it was awful.

> When a woman brings up something in a meeting if you believe it as a women you should speak up, you should speak up immediately after that woman has spoken and I guess that it would go for a male colleague as well but it's the women who need the pick up, mention their name and

say I agree with what _____ said for these reasons and then shore up her opinions.

Instead of this deadly silence that used to follow. I was as guilty as _____ and she was a great friend of mine too.

But I would be quiet because she had said it all, what more could I say? But I should of at least said...

And also I think because there was an element of...seeing the eyes roll and who wants to be associated with that right! You gradually get the courage up.

So I would go talk to her after.

"Good for you, I agree with you" but we'd never say that in public, at the meeting. I mean I learned to do it a little bit better but not enough because you're influenced by all that.

Oh, I know. They're respected leaders and when they sigh (laughter) at your colleague and you think, she hasn't even started speaking yet.

You know some of the things that we sit and take you know...

It astounds you...

It astounds me.

Conversation February 16, 1993

Changing the knowledge base, reorganizing it, expanding it, seems a formidable task yet it is not necessarily one that can not be accomplished and achieved. Our conversation about supporting women shows a way for us to begin.

But when I think of meetings when some colleagues, women who I admire, would say things there were a lot of eyeballs rolling.

Oh sure, sighs!

I remember the classic one was one school was in trouble financially and she said why don't we all chip in a bit. And the looks of disdain.

From men?

> Yes, right. And actually it was a heck of an idea. I mean if you've got $400, you can give, it's not like you won't get it back. It wasn't even feasible. So I don't know if men think, what would she do or what would a woman do.
>
> Because we certainly think the other way.
>
> We certainly do.
>
> We tend to compare ourselves...
>
> I think some men are starting to take more risks, though, at meetings.
>
> Maybe it's because women have demonstrated that they're willing to and they haven't been totally put down, maybe there's just eyeball rolling, whatever, I wish.
>
> Conversation December 2, 1992

So, Ann, it shows us one way, that of publicly speaking in support of our women colleagues - when we agree I must add. However, it is not an action that we readily take because of the response women have received from the "acknowledged" leaders. The idea of sharing, reaching out and helping another school has merit. She was, in essence, presenting an alternative construct to the way we organize based on separation, to one of connection, relating a caring manner to someone requiring care. Her idea was presenting a female perspective and approach. Ferguson (1984) states that "a feminist discourse in organizations would encourage the caring and reciprocity central to a relational world view which gives prior concern to others" (p. 123).

The idea of introducing feminist discourse, valuing women's ways of constructing knowledge and relating to others, brought out fear and uncertainty in our conversation.

> You know, I think that whatever we do, or whatever, whatever...if we decide to do anything, I think it's critical that we not be perceived as women administrators, that it's an administration issue, not an issue of because we're women we have this issue.

And that's an interesting thing, I go, I go backwards and forwards on that one because I think there are some things that we can say as women that are definitely women's issues.

I do too, but my, my feeling is that if we are perceived as women only...

But why do we have to be afraid of that?

I know that...we have to be afraid of that because of the way we've been treated historically. If it's perceived as they're whining because they're women, we will not be taken seriously. If the issue becomes only of if, if it's the job and not the fact that we're female that makes the job difficult, but it's the job itself that makes the job difficult, then, they, we're safe.

If it's perceived to be a women's issue it won't be listened to by our male colleagues, generally speaking, but it will also not be listened to by our female colleagues.

Cause you're seen as a threat.

We're perceived as a threat right now and if we can fail WOW! I mean that's really strong.

Yeah, like I'm not like her, I'm like you guys.

Yeah.

Conversation February 16, 1993

Our fear and uncertainty again raises the ideas within domination/ subordination theory. With the dominate group values having been defined from a male perspective, "maleness" has become the normative, the standard by which we judge our success. It therefore seems to make sense that one should adopt male characteristics to be viewed as being successful. It is taking a risk by publicly affiliating oneself with the subordinate group that gives an initial message that one has not achieved status within the dominate group. We are left with an uncertainty in how to best support women's issues, embedded

within others or recognizing them as issues deserving of and warranting undivided attention and action.

> But can you present a woman's issue or an issue though women identify with it and voice it as the overall issue? You don't have to have the gender?
>
> You see _____, I hear what you're saying and you're probably right and I think that realistically that's right but at some point as a woman that, like I've been through all, and that at some point...
>
> That you don't want to perpetuate that.
>
> ...yes that's right - at what point do we say enough? What we feel as women is valid, that the way we perceive the job is different or here is a group of women who think of the job a little differently and you know what...we're damn good and we do it differently and our concerns are valid.
>
> Conversation February 16, 1993

As we struggle with voicing women's issues, our anger comes out. We question how long we "play the game", how long we perpetuate the myth that our ways of knowing are represented within our work as administrators.

Ursula Le Guin speaks of fear and anger, not only of those who haven't spoken but of those who haven't heard.

> I know that many men, and even women are afraid and angry when women do speak, because in this barbaric society, when women speak truly they speak subversively - they can't help it, if you're underneath, if you're kept down, you break out, you subvert. We are volcanoes. When we women offer our experience as our truth, as human truth, all the maps change. There are new mountains. That's what I want - to hear you erupting (1986, p. 159).

Ann, it seems that though I have known you for many years, in fact, I have not really gotten to know you. Though we have been working in, if not the same, very similar jobs, we have not connected in our work. Our conversation in February makes it clear

that we are not alone in not establishing relationships in our work lives in order to discuss and to share what we are doing.

> You know the truth of the matter is, I don't know a lot of my female colleagues, I don't know a lot of my male colleagues either and that's the truth of the matter. I know them to say hi but really knowing them in terms of what they think about education, how they think about their schools, I don't.
>
> In meetings there doesn't exist the chance.
>
> The opportunity at all.
>
> Conversation February 3, 1993

Existing networks did not help us to understand our perspectives, help us create the schools we believed should exist.

> I think that certain networks evolve. Like _____ principals used to meet together but I never attended.
>
> But for what purpose though?
>
> See, there was a _____ principals' group that got started and I went and all the other principals were male at the time, and I went and the issues that they were talking about were simply not issues that I cared to spend my time talking with them about. And it just didn't ah.
>
> Um, ah ah.
>
> It was this hail fellow, ho ho! ha ha! jolly, jolly and all this, I mean I just felt out of place. I thought that wasn't me.
>
> I never even felt comfortable enough to go once. I mean like they invited me out of politeness.
>
> You were in the area.
>
> And yet again, the way they looked at the world, their philosophical premises, the way that they operated as a principal were very different, very different then me.
>
> Conversation February 3, 1993

But we didn't form other groups, groups of women who wanted to connect in conversation. Perhaps we thought that other women fit into the existing networks and it was only ourselves who did not. We created a group of one because we did not want others to know we did not fit! It could again be because of what we saw happening to women who did speak out.

After our times together as a group, I believe our actions will change. I believe we now have identified women from whom we can receive support. Our conversations, too, show some signs that women will not necessarily be the only ones who support our ways.

> There are a few, and I mean a few men, who, for whatever reason I think are as intuitive and sensitive to some of these issues, I sense...
>
> Yes.
>
> Uh, uh.
>
> Uh, uh.
>
> Interestingly enough I have a couple of individuals in mind as I say that, what I've noticed is that the only time I ever heard those concerns is when they are with a group of women.
>
> Umm.
>
> That they feel free enough to express them.
>
> They don't say those same things when there are other male administrators in the group.
>
> Conversation February 16, 1993

It is interesting but not surprising that just as we have been covert in recognizing women's ways, so too are our male colleagues who do.

> In a very deep sense, then we have reached a situation in which mens allowing themselves in a primary way to be attuned to the needs of others and to serve others threatens them with being like a woman. To be like a woman is almost to be nothing. This does not mean that all men make this formulation of thought in an explicit way; most of them do not. It does mean that this is how a man is led to feel and structure his perceptions in an internal, unarticulated way." (Miller, 1986, p. 72)

Many of our actions and our male colleagues' actions are culturally imposed. As Blackmore (1989) states certain roles and behaviours are assigned by society to males and females and they, in turn, conform to these roles to different degrees. In that these roles are assigned and accepted, there exists the opportunity to reconstruct them and provide women and men with other role choices. In order for this to happen I believe we cannot be covert in our actions. We must show support and value for women's ways.

> I wonder if men would be interested in knowing, in in sort of exploring whether women do things differently. I wonder if they're as curious. I mean we're always comparing ourselves to men and how men do that. I wonder if men think the other way, how do women do things, I wonder if they're even interested.
>
> Conversation December 2, 1992

I believe some men would be interested and experience some of the struggles women do in living out roles prescribed to them by society.

> Many women raised in male-dominated cultures have to struggle against the impulse to sacrifice their health for the health of the whole...But many men raised in the same traditions have to struggle against pervasive imageries in which their own health or growth is a victory achieved at the expense of the other.
>
> (Bateson, 1990, p. 240)

Our wondering will only continue if we do not speak to one another as women. We will not know each other's stories nor will men know them if we are silent. Through

talk we may be able to value the "different", the female, for both our daughters and our sons. We have to decide what we really want.

> This is what I don't want: I won't want what men have. I'm glad to let them do their work and talk their talk. But I do not want and will not have them saying or thinking or telling us that theirs is the only fit work or speech for human beings. Let them not take our work, our words, from us. If they can, if they will, let them work with us and talk with us. We can all talk mother tongue, we can all talk father tongue, and together we can try to hear and speak that language which may be our truest way of being in the world, we who speak for a world that has no words but ours.
>
> Le Guin (1986, p.159)

Ann, I think it is possible that the "different", the female perspective, may become valued by both our daughters and our sons, and not be seen as being different. The relation between talk and work seems critical.

To work together we must talk and our talk must be of our work together.

Linda

A LETTER TO ALL

Dear Maureen, Beth, Flora and Ann:

We came together to share, through conversation, stories about our lives as women in administration. By reflecting on our lives, we could use our enhanced understanding, our reconstructed knowledge, to see how we would change in carrying out our work.

In sharing stories of our experiences as women principals, we did explore how we live our work but we did not do so in isolation. We did not separate, disjoint ourselves, by distinguishing our work lives from our personal lives. In fact, our conversations delved deeply into the connections between those aspects of our lives, how they really were intertwined. This connection led us to tell more about our lives, first as women, not as women in administration. We acknowledged that "our personal was our professional" and "our professional was our personal". We sensed the essence of connection in our lives, a striving for the creation and nurturing of relation. Our times together in conversation established a trust among us where "to trust...means to connect" (Belenky et al, 1986). Our trust enabled us to share in our stories.

> Storytelling is fundamental to the human search for meaning, whether we tell stories of the creation of the earth or of our own early choices.
>
> Bateson (1990, p. 34)

In our search for meaning and understanding of our storied lives, we were constructing a knowledge centred on possible ways women develop and come to

know, rather than according to the dominant developmental model which is based on principles of scientific method, objectivity, separation and rationality. Our stories show how the qualities of connection, understanding, receptivity and first hand experience give birth to knowledge and understanding (Belenky et al, 1986).

Collectively, we were finding in our stories an abundance of knowledge, knowledge we had not used extensively in living our lives. A decision sometimes made by choice, sometimes not, but always made within a male-defined framework for decision and meaning making. Our knowledge is not viewed as being "standard" and therefore is not sanctioned as being worthy. Before we can re-story our lives, we must tell and reflect on the stories we have lived, to understand more of why we have not known or have abandoned our ways of knowing.

> I questioned when I became a principal, am I what a principal is?
>
> Supposed to be.
>
> Yes.
>
> (laughter) I'm still going through that I tell you.
>
> It is defined...
>
> In male terms.
>
> Yes, male terms and the words that are used and the organization too. I wonder am I that person and am I um, oh...not being true to myself sometimes, am I losing touch with what I truly believe, to meet organization requirements, or is the organization malleable enough that it cam be shaped? I don't know the answers to those questions.
>
> Or how much do I ignore, how much can I ignore?

Conversation January 19, 1993

Our conversation provides us with some explanation for how we have used or not used our knowledge. How much have we each set ourselves aside to be "that person"? How much room is there for negotiation between each one of us and the organization? Can change be made from within or must we leave the existing framework? Do we see transformation of the institution or abandonment? The struggle is in discovering how and what kind of relationships can be created. It is crucial that we access and use our personal knowledge, within our stories, in the discovery of the ways to transform our lives as administrators.

Most of our conversations found us telling our stories for the first time. We were finding our voices, describing "ourselves to ourselves" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 2). Anne Oakley speaks strongly to the urgency of knowing ourselves.

> Women now more than ever cannot afford to disregard the task of understanding themselves. Re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction - is for women more than a chapter in cultural history, it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. But such a drive to self-knowledge is more than the dilatory self-interested pastime of the so-called liberated woman. It is a serious human enterprise. It is a protest against the dehumanization of society made by women on behalf of everyone, because it is women who find themselves most discomforted by the gap between who they are and what they are supposed to be.
>
> Oakley (1992, p. 2)

> I think part of what we need to do though as administrators is talk, is to talk to one another.

Yes, I do too.

Because I don't think for a moment that it is just...

Just a woman's issue.

Yeah, just a woman's issue.

No.

But I think there are aspects of it, as a woman, as a woman's issue that makes the job different. And that, and that being that still the vast majority of women, they have a family...

Feel that responsibility.

Uh, uh.

And you see that, there is some safety in numbers because I, as an individual, might not feel very comfortable saying this is what I believe, for whatever reason, I may fear for my job whatever, but if fifteen of us who are really good, together say something then surely they have to listen, it's not as easy to say we'll get rid of them, they can leave, somebody else can take their place.

Even if nothing happens when you express it, you've had voice.

That's right.

And I think you've been strengthened by doing and you will do it again and maybe be doing that.

And then eventually get some change in how the job is defined and expected to be done. Because when I think about it, it's often isolated voices talking. You know you feel strongly about this issue, I feel strongly about this issue, but none of us together feel strongly about one issue. None of us as administrators together decide on some issues that we're going to understand.

> But isn't that part, the reason we don't get together is that's not the intent of administration, the definition is lone, administer. You make the decisions, pass them on to others.
>
> You're in the hierarchy, you're the leader, you're the...
>
> And I think that we don't want to show weakness.
>
> Conversation, February 16, 1993

Knowing and understanding ourselves begins with the sharing and claiming of our stories. Our claiming is the beginning of our awareness of the knowledge originating from our stories and the belief that it is equal to knowledge created through other means. It is in our awareness of and recognition of the value that rests within our self-knowledge that a female perspective, one which speaks of relation and connection as a way we all can live our lives. The introduction of and the acceptance of a woman's perspective into our society is critical for not only the well being of women but the well being of everyone, female and male alike (Oakley, 1991).

Claiming within our circle, though we were taking risks, felt safe. Claiming "outside" created feelings of vulnerability and fear, because our talk, that of which we would speak and how we would speak, is different from what most people are accustomed to hearing. It is this very difference and our claiming of it that creates a tension, interpreted by some as a challenge, between women and men.

> Women's talk is not inherently or naturally subversive; it becomes so when women begin to privilege it over their interactions with men.
>
> Cameron (1985, p. 144)

We may indeed value our conversations with women more than those with men, but to afford them more privilege is to give them more importance and power. This then only strives to create a change in who has the power rather than how the power is organized in our society. We are only perpetuating the present way power is defined and structured, by having one gender's voice more valued than another. Our challenge is how to show acceptance and appreciation for different voices, female and male, and to listen for the ways we could organize and live our lives so power is not taken and cloistered by one group. Indeed I believe that we must hear everyone's stories, but hear them equally.

> My interest lies in the interaction of experience and thought, in different voices and the dialogues to which they give rise, in the way we listen to ourselves and to others, in the stories we tell about our lives.
>
> Gilligan (1982, p.2)

Silencing our voices, not telling our stories, will only cause us to be heard in years to come, in pain and in anger.

> In my old age I'm getting rabid.
>
> Well you know I think that, I always look upon age as a time when you get to be the revolutionary and the rebel and that was because my grandmother.
>
> Was.
>
> Yep! She said, whatever had to be said.
>
> I think I have to go back to do those things. It's true, you have that sense of independence that you feel, that's it, I'm not...

No pussy footing around, and she was, was partially deaf so she talked in a, in a very loud voice, and if, and if everybody in the family was thinking, of that's not a very wise thing but nobody said anything my grandmother would say that's the most ridiculous thing I've every ta da, ta da, ta da! You know she just didn't pull any bones.

You know it's taken me a long time to believe that I'm okay that I've done a good job and I did it differently. That it was okay. I spent all those years thinking that I hadn't. It's not that I don't feel I have lots to learn but if I, but somehow that sense that I wasn't measuring up to it's not a good feeling and then I think back to my career and I think "you have no reason to feel that way".

No. Well, I know my voice isn't loud enough, mostly because ah, I feel that it took me so long to get there, that now that I'm there I'm not ready to give it up yet and I'm, I'm insecure.

And you're afraid of that. That was the same with me. We're all in that together.

Well how did we get there, such competent teachers, you know you look around the group...

And competent people.

Yes.

Conversation February 16, 1993

Our conversation tells us we are competent, but it has been a struggle to show that in ways that were perhaps not of our choosing nor in how we believed we should be judged.

> It is perhaps only in old age...that women can stop being female impersonators, can grasp the opportunity to reverse their most cherished principles of "femininity"...can make use of security...seniority, to take risks, to make noise, to be courageous, to become unpopular.

Heilburn (1988, p. 126/131)

But I wonder can we wait? I believe not and I say that not only with women in mind, women who have struggled within male-dominated cultures but for men "raised in the same tradition"...in a "struggle against pervasive imageries in which their own health or growth is a victory achieved at the expense of the other" (Bateson, 1990, p. 240). Though we have struggled and suffered within our patriarchally defined society, we continued in our conversations to speak of reaching out, of placing ourselves in relation with our male colleagues so we could talk and establish communities which would foster understanding between us.

> So what do we do then as women? What options do we have? If, if I mean...if the job as it's defined is not appropriate, is not appropriately defined for anyone, be it man or woman...
>
> And I don't think it's good for men either.
>
> No, no.
>
> Right.
>
> But women have, and who knows maybe men are having that kind of conversation about themselves too. So what do we do?
>
> I think that our male colleagues can support us, there are some who are intuitive enough.
>
> Especially the ones that have family, experience with ah, family upheaval, when they've been consumed by their job and they know that's the reason for the upheaval.
>
> Yeah, and what a price they pay. They pay a price, ultimately, that women have paid all along.

> We really do need to explore this. We really do need to talk. Everyone.
>
> Conversation February 16, 1993

In these conversations with men it is imperative that we do not silence ourselves by choosing not to speak in woman's language, a language of receptivity and responsiveness. It is our language which will give us the words to express our meaning.

> Men do not control meaning at all. Rather women elect to use modes of expression men can understand because this is the best way of getting men to listen.
>
> Cameron (1985, p. 105)

I believe men do control meaning for when we "elect" to use male defined language we are acknowledging that language as the dominant language. Cameron (1985) states that the problem is not one of language but of power. But language is power. Male power over language has chosen which stories are told. That is why we, as women, must use our language to speak to each other and to men when we tell our stories.

> When we come together in conversation the invitation should be to join in a dialectical conversation between men and women that will embody dialectics between feeling and thinking, between concrete and abstract, between present and future, between community and school. Women, by our very nature, are unlikely to seek domination in education; our circles will be circles of support not of power. But it is time for the voice of the mother to be heard.
>
> Noddings (1984, p. 200)

Sharing in conversation with men is important but we cannot do so at the expense of not having conversations among women.

> I do not believe that new stories will find their way into texts if they do not begin in oral exchanges among women in groups hearing and talking to one another. As long as women are isolated one from another, not allowed to offer other women the most personal accounts of their lives, they will not be part of any narrative of their own.
>
> Heilburn (1988, p. 46)

We came together to share, through conversation, stories about our lives as women in administration. We shared much more. We shared "personal accounts", our stories of ourselves, stories of women. We are part of our own narratives.

It is now that I believe we begin to re-story our lives, to have voice is how our stories will be experienced and what will be told. Our language for our stories is "a language always on the verge of silence and often on the verge of song (Le Guin, 1986, p. 150).

The songs will not always tell what we want to hear, but they will have been heard and not only by women.

Our stories I believe will let our women's voices enter into our schools so new and different stories can be told within them. In educating our children, women's voices will be voices which speak of connection, of dreams to tell stories of a future where all children, young women and men, tell personal stories, stories which speak of connection within themselves and with others, a connection constructed by equality in relationships.

Our connections, through our conversations, is a beginning for these stories to be told.

> It is when people become challengers, when they take initiatives, that they begin to create the kinds of spaces where dialogue can take place and freedom can appear. And it's then, and probably only then, that people begin thinking about working together to bring into being a better, fairer, more humane state of things.
>
> Greene (1990, p.1)

Our challenge must be an invitation not to compete, but to collaborate.

Linda

A LETTER TO MYSELF

> And so we speak, softly at first and then in rising pitch as we recognize ourselves in each other. I embrace our conversations, for in our exchanges comes release from encapsulation.
>
> Miller (1986, p. 121)

Dear Linda:

In capturing our conversations on tape and in the writing of a letter to each woman, I believe I must now write a letter to myself. At first I thought this would be difficult and awkward, but in fact it helped me to understand in more depth the feelings I experienced as a participant observer. Writing "my" letter provides yet another opportunity to use narrative inquiry, for me to create another narrative text which will help to make sense of my experience and lead to yet another new lived experience.

I could begin my letter in many ways, but I have chosen to begin with my invitation, for it was the invitation which made it possible for our stories to be shared.

In extending my invitation to five colleagues to participate in a collaborative, narrative research project I was, in fact, asking them to enter into relationships with me and with each other. The basis of our relationships as a group was on having each woman's voice heard, that is, no one voice would have more power than another. We gathered so we could have conversations about our lives. Our conversations were "non-hierarchical oral exchanges" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1992, p. 9), so our relationships within the group were ones of equality.

The narrative approach was initially responded to with surprise by the participants. Somehow it was as if Elbaz had been in our study for her words captured our experiences. There exists "the perception that the investigation and elaboration of (one's) own knowledge is not altogether legitimate as a research activity" (Elbaz, 1987, p. 46).

> Are you recording this?
>
> Yes... (laughter by all of us)
>
> Is that what's going to happen? Are we just going to talk or, or are you going to have a question for us to talk around?
>
> No, I'm just going to talk and listen and tape. So we're just going to, if you're comfortable with it.
>
> It'll be interesting to see what comes up. (laughter)
>
> This could be frightening! (boisterous laughter)
>
> Conversation October 14, 1992

I too remember wondering if my work was going to be considered as legitimate research, the kind of research I had been taught to regard as scientific, as true. I thought back to Polanyi's (1978) words and how personal knowledge is the "fusion of the personal and the objective" (p. vii). One's personal experience has value and is an essential ingredient in the creation of knowledge. Gilligan (1982) also presents the creation of knowledge from a different perspective, one which also recognizes the relationship between personal experience and knowledge.

> This discovery occurs when theories formerly considered to be sexually neutral in their scientific objectivity are found instead to reflect a consistent observational and evaluative bias. Then the presumed neutrality of science, like that of language itself, gives way to the recognition that the categories of knowledge are human constructions...as well we begin to notice how accustomed we have become to seeing life through men's eyes.
>
> Gilligan (1982, p. 6)

> Deliberately storying and restorying one's life is...a fundamental method of personal (and social) growth. It is a fundamental quality of education...narrative research builds on this process of growth.
>
> Clandinin and Connelly (1991, p. 259)

A criticism of research where the researcher is a participant observer is that it is too subjective. I challenge this idea by considering the number of sources used in creating and interpreting knowledge in this research approach compared to research steeped in natural science methodology.

> The traditional empiricist considers himself (as a scientist) to be the primary source of knowledge and trusts his own senses and logic more than he would trust that of his subjects. The participant observer, on the other hand, considers the interpretations of his subjects to have first importance.
>
> Bruyn (1966, p. 12)

My colleagues were expecting that in my role of researcher I would provide the focus for our conversations and, at least initially, would provide guiding questions or raise issues to initiate and stimulate conversation. The expectation that I would "lead" the group was, I believe, due to our present understanding of what research is - objective, unbiased, with a space between the researcher and participants.

Narrative research allows for experiences and knowledge that have been hidden, gone unnoticed or been repressed to surface, to be recognized.

> Women's valuable characteristics are common, not rare. They exist in abundance in "ordinary women". Often women themselves don't notice them and they are diverted away from noticing them - systematically.
>
> Miller (1986, p. x)

If I conducted my research in a scientific and objective manner I would find myself "systematically diverting" the women and myself from recognizing our valuable characteristics. I would be perpetuating the existence of such a space with an inherent message that women should share their stories only when asked and only by providing the parts requested.

I also had initially thought about interviewing the women but I abandoned this idea as I reflected on Anne Oakley's comment that interviewing women was a "contradiction in terms" (1984, p. 30). These women had stories to share, much to offer. Any questions I posed in an interview would very possibly screen out their stories, by acting as a sieve or, at the very least, as a frame for them.

Whether I led the group through introducing topics for our conversations or by interviewing them I would be placing myself in an authority position by having the power to set direction for the group.

> I relax my controlling impulse and let the situation absorb and direct me...My decision to do so is mine, it requires an effort in preparation, but it also requires a letting go of my attempts to control. This sort of

> passivity...is not a mindless, vegetable like passivity. It is a controlled state that abstains from controlling the situation.
>
> Noddings (1984, p. 165)

My "controlled state" would be realized in my being a participant in our group, not the leader. Passivity here, for me, took a lot of effort to be realized, effort in not adopting a traditional mode of research inquiry by giving way to participants' expectations and my own. Here I was establishing the beginnings of a trust in our relations. I was trusting that each woman would collaborate in the research, share and claim their voice within it. I was trusting that they would enter into the "space" which was usually guarded and kept between researcher and participant. It was this very "space" that I was inviting participants to enter in with me. It was a space I had to enter into with them, not as the distanced researcher but with them as a woman administrator, a participant with them. It would be this space that would give us the opportunity to create relationships.

Our collaborative explorations, within our space, encouraged the development of "relationships" among us and the realization of connected knowing.

> Connected knowing builds on the subjectivist's conviction that the most trustworthy knowledge comes from personal experience rather than the pronouncements of authorities.
>
> Belenky et al (1986, p. 112)

In letting our conversations direct themselves we acknowledged that our personal experiences form a basis for knowledge and that it is equal to knowledge arrived at through other means. This was initially not seen as a possibility and that is why I believe the expectation to "research" in an objective manner existed. My decision to not assume a "lead" role in our conversations allowed for shared authority between us. By shared authority I do not mean that we each individually took turns at being in a power position but that authority could, and was, experienced by two or more of us at all times. I see this arising from our collaboration through conversations. We were always sharing and building on our own and each other's stories, making commonality of experience the determiner of authority in our connected knowing not power, status or certification (Belenky et al, p. 118).

Because there was not an "authority" in the group, I believe we were able to establish trust more easily and quickly. The absence of authority removes the anticipation of being judged and helps an atmosphere of trust to be created. We naturally established that in sharing stories through conversations that our purpose was "not to judge but to understand" (Belenky et al, p.116).

In forming our group,my initial conversations with each woman centred around the idea of coming together to share our experiences as women in administration and as women. Inherent in the invitation was the opportunity to connect with others who shared similar experiences, to form relationships.

The similarity of our experiences or, at least, a possibility of that, contributed to trust building, for in the similarity there existed the chance that we were not alone in living the stories we did. This, I believe, was an extremely important reason behind the anticipation we all felt about the group forming and the appreciation expressed in being included.

> That sounds terrific, what a good idea. When will it be?
>
> Conversation September 10, 1992

> Wonderful. I'd love to. I'm really interested in story and sharing. Thanks for thinking of me and asking me.
>
> Conversation September 11, 1992

> Oh, that sounds like a wonderful idea, it will be so good to have that time.
>
> Conversation September 11, 1992

> Have you set the times yet? Can the others come? Call me as soon as you know.
>
> Conversation September 10, 1992

Through participation in the group there existed the possibility for empathy, as defined by Noddings (1984), to be experienced by us all. She describes empathy as a "feeling with" one that "does not involve projection but reception" where she shares, "I receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other" (p. 30). I believe our anticipation was the desire to have a sense of "feeling with", of receptivity. I know that I felt and hoped for that.

Though the notion of conducting research through conversation seemed initially questionable, it was quite natural for us. Women tend to step into relationships, not away from them (Miller, 1986). Our conversations allowed each of us to step into relationships at a time that felt right personally. Maureen waited until our conversation centred around how we show caring towards staff to share how she felt that she wasn't valued when she wasn't granted a leave and had to resign her designation. Ann expressed her surprise at not knowing how much she really needed to share and to talk about her work. And Beth spoke softly when she shared that her voice isn't strong enough at meetings because she is still afraid of being judged.

We would have to make use of what Belenky et al refer to as our "self-knowledge" and to use it to "span the distance" between our experiences and those of the other women, and we would, they say "need to learn to respect (our) own reactions, not as final truths but a starting point for understanding". This would begin to connect us as we began to seek meaning from our conversations.

A challenge to my personal self-knowledge and my understanding of it presented itself in terms of my role as researcher and participant. I had removed myself as the leader so as to equally participate in our conversations. I would not be the one to dominate the group. But who was I to be? Was I to be silent to hear their stories? Were my stories part of the conversation? After our group had met a few times, I was reflecting on our conversations and how, for the most part, we had stayed in the realm of our professional lives, with some snatches of the "personal" but

not very much. I wondered why this was, especially when each one had, when I met them individually, shared very personal stories. I came to realize that one reason our conversations hovered around our professional lives was that those stories were safe stories. I, too, had chosen to share my "safe" stories. I was perhaps influencing our group covertly, share and share alike. I questioned why I was sharing the stories I did. Was it really because I didn't want to sway the group, to ensure that they had "voice" or was I was unsure of, even fearful of, sharing a personal story, a private story? If I was feeling tentative about sharing stories that spoke authentically of my life as a woman administrator could the same be true for the other women? If I wanted to establish a sense of equality and of safety within the group, I needed to personally take a risk and share a story that spoke of my struggles, uncertainties, tensions as a woman administrator. I had to establish a connection with the other women that let them sense the trust I had in them, a trust that enabled me to share a personal story. I hesitated to share my personal story because I would be vulnerable, a state of being that I had come to believe was undesirable. It was not that the feeling of vulnerability within the group would be intolerable, it was that it is not an acceptable condition as defined by our society. Being vulnerable was something I rarely let myself be as I worked in administration. Miller (1986) believes that,

> Women are better able to consciously admit feelings of weakness or vulnerability...but we have not recognized the importance of this ability (p. 31).

So I shared my personal story and from that sharing created further connections of understanding of myself, of others and by others. I shared how I had made a decision to take a year's maternity leave and the reaction from colleagues was mostly amazement about how I was giving up so much in terms of my career. Little thought was given to what my decision would give me in experience and how that experience would enhance what I would bring to my career.

A strength was realized from sharing what I had perceived as being a vulnerability. My story wasn't only mine - it was a story that called forth from the others similar stories that they now could share. Our connections were deepened.

The place and time of our coming together also helped create trust and a sense of community. Meeting in my home and sharing a meal created an atmosphere in which we were comfortable. Our conversations were intimate, informal and unstructured, each aspect contributing to a sense of trust in our sharing. "Women have been practising this kind of conversation since childhood." (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 114).

The setting was even more important than I originally thought, for the opportunity it presented for us to share in mother tongue.

> The mother tongue, spoken or written, expects an answer. It is conversation, a word the root of which means "turning together". The mother tongue is language, not a mere communication but as a relation, relationships. It connects.
>
> Le Guin (1986, p. 149)

The opportunity for us to converse in mother tongue was important because it too influenced what conversations we would have. I believed that my response to the question raised in our group of "Why do you have only women in your group?" recognizes that mother tongue is a language spoken by most women and some men. My response to the question was,

> I believe that women tell different stories when they are with women, just as men tell different stories when they are with men.
>
> Conversation December 1, 1992

Deborah Tannen (1991) contends that many men conduct their conversations as negotiations, trying always to be one up, as in a contest where one strives to remain independent and successful. Womens' conversations, she believes, are negotiations for closeness rather than separation. She suggests that most women "try to seek and give confirmation and support...preserve intimacy and avoid isolation" (p. 25).

I had wondered about having a group of women and men but had decided that I would only invite women colleagues. At that time it was an intuition, a feeling. Now I see I would have run the risk of silencing our mother tongue and that would have been too great a risk to take.

> Would you have told your story about _____ as much if our group was women and men?
>
> I don't know. No.

> I know, I know I'd never have told my story about making notes on my pad because I always thought it was because I didn't delegate properly. That that was sort of, of a weakness of mine.
>
> See.
>
> Yeah, for sure.
>
> See, we look at it all, all of it, different.
>
> Conversation December 2, 1992

The relationships between us, all of us, both researchers and participants, our surroundings and our mother tongue figured prominently in establishing trust among us.

> Because of the underlying trust in conversation, this methodology may end up probing more deeply than aggressive questioning techniques.
>
> Connelly (1992, p. 9)

Connelly's prediction was realized in our group. Each woman shared stories that would not have been told if it had been left up to me as the researcher to attempt to draw or "squeeze" out of them. Our conversations probed more deeply because we each were able to share what was important to us as individuals, and finding that similar stories were lived by others in the group, we were cementing our connections, through our shared experiences. The importance of each of us choosing what stories we could share was matched by the intensity of our listening. Our stories were received with care and receptive attention. In seeking meaning from stories shared

we listened more, we didn't interrupt. We asked each other to tell more or we would share a story.

> Intimacy becomes the critical experience that brings the self back into connection with others, making it possible to see both sides...intimacy is the transformative experience...
>
> Gilligan (1982, p. 163)

As I finished my story of struggling with taking a maternity leave, the others responded in ways that validated, that asked me to probe more deeply. It was their questioning within intimacy that allowed me to understand my experiences in new ways.

The trust and intimacy of our group not only connected us with one another, it connected self with self, which fostered a way of knowing called "constructed knowledge" by Belenky et al. They define constructed knowledge as "the integrating of knowledge one feels intuitively is personally important with knowledge learned from others" (1986, p. 134).

Sharing my personal story caused me not only to understand it and the feelings it created in me more fully but to also sense a change in how I was relating to the stories shared by the others. It was like the feeling one experiences when attempting to assemble something following the "instructions" as provided and it just doesn't work. To make it work, one makes her own instructions. I felt I was making meaning from the stories by following my instructions. I was not restricted by the provided instructions. This did not make it easier to understand all of the

stories shared. In fact, it accentuated the multiplicity of questions, implications I could ask and reflect on.

> To learn to speak in an unique and authentic voice, women must "jump outside" the frames and systems authorities provide and create their own frame.
>
> Belenky et al (1986, p. 134)

As we were constructing knowledge we were at the same time experiencing what Clandinin and Connelly refer to as "awakening".

> This felt moment of awareness may not be one moment in time but may be more of an ongoing sense of unease, a sense of unease as we recognize that our way of living and telling our stories is not the best way or a sense of unease as we recognize that others have other ways of living and telling their stories, stories that might be possibilities for our lives.
>
> Clandinin and Connelly (1991, p. 7)

Our conversations were providing the sustenance for awakenings. The relationships and connections within our group would provide us with support when awakenings gave way to the "unease".

> You know some of the things that we sit and take you know...
>
> It astounds you?
>
> It astounds me!
>
> Why do we take that stuff?
>
> Conversation February 16, 1993
>
> That you don't want to perpetuate that...

> Yes, that's right - at what point do we say enough? What we feel as women is valid, that the way we perceive the job is different or here is a group of women who think of the job, differently and you know what...we're damn good and we do it differently and our concerns are valid.
>
> Conversation February 16, 1993

> Our unease was experienced as frustration and anger.
>
> Awakenings are complex for it is as we waken and then in wakefulness that we see ourselves and our world in different ways.
>
> Clandinin and Connelly (1991, p. 8)

Without awakenings we wouldn't be able to understand and make meaning from our storied lives. Reflection requires awakenings so further, deeper reflection may occur. Awakenings allow for transformation to occur, for us to make changes (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991) in how we live our lives and the stories we will be able to tell in the future. They allow us to respond to, "But why didn't I do that before?", (Conversation February 16, 1993), with an understanding of why it wasn't done before and an understanding of how it might well be done now and in the future.

My reflections helped me to understand the tension I experienced between living my job as I thought I should and according to other people's expectations.

> What is your policy on children coming back into their rooms to get mittens?
>
> What is your policy on children using the front door?

What is your policy...?

Journal September 1992

I believed that we should talk about "policy", perhaps have guidelines, not always policy, but it was not only me who should bring forth policy. Yet these questions were asked of me many times. Colleagues were giving me power, power that I wanted to share with them. My reflections showed the need for us to talk about what we saw as our jobs in our school. My struggle was in finding ways of using the power they gave to me in ways that would reciprocate it. And together, shaping what power looked and felt like in the school.

I ask myself "Why didn't I do this before?", that is, gather with colleagues in administration to talk about the work we do. I believe I was trying to do my job as I saw it done by those around me. There was talk among colleagues about "school problems" but they were usually easily taken care of. I didn't get a sense that one should tell how difficult the job can be.

I had gathered with teacher colleagues a great deal before I "left the classroom" and those gatherings nurtured my personal practical knowledge. The phrase "left the classroom" provides insight for me. Though I (and the others in our group) didn't leave the classroom so we could distance ourselves from teaching - do administration - I sensed that there was indeed a separation that was expected so that we would be able to carry out administrative duties effectively, efficiently and objectively. I did not have the same sense that Baughman (1977) found of women

that teaching and administration were very different, distinct from one another. These women were viewing administration from the status quo perspective, a male perspective where I believe administration and teaching are viewed as being separate and different.

However, I wondered if I was right in seeing the two as being inseparable, and not wanting to disconnect them. Was anyone else wondering the same? As the dissonance built between what I believed I should do as an administrator and what I found myself doing, I realized I needed to talk with others. In my attempts to establish different types of relationships with staff, collegial in nature, it was necessary for me to establish relations with others who I thought were attempting the same in their schools. I sought out relationships to enhance my understanding of them. I awakened to the importance of "relation" in my personal making of meaning and in working with others. I was acknowledging that there is another way, a woman's way of experiencing and living life. And it is valid.

Another personal awakening was the power of collaborative research when sharing is done within a spirit of equality and trust. Self-reflection nurtured my understanding of personal experiences, but the sharing of this understanding with others enhanced awareness. Group sharing and reflection is invaluable in generating new possibilities (Elbaz, 1987). Our collaborative research, our conversations, allowed us to choose what would be shared, needed to be shared, and enabled us to understand in more depth the meaning within our personal lives which we then could

use in enhancing our understanding of other aspects of our lives. Nias (1987) says these understandings result in

> ...alterations in self-perception which may be painful, provoking anxiety, uncertainty and a sense of loss. The culture of teaching often protects people from these feelings...while the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of schools reduces the likelihood that teachers will be exposed in a supportive environment to the challenge of others' views (1987, p. 137).

The strength of our collaboration was realized in that there was a sense of empathy whether the unease was experienced by one or all of us.

> We all know the feeling expressed in our conversation...
>
> Who do you talk to? Who do you share it with?
>
> There would be days I know, after everyone had gone home and it was quiet. I would think. Like who do you call, just to talk?
>
> Um um.
>
> Yeah, uh uh.
>
> Like who do you call?
>
> Conversation October 14, 1992

We all had felt that in our lives. We also had experienced the sense of isolation shared in this conversation...

> In my first year I never felt so powerless, in my life, like I had less power than when I was teaching.
>
> In terms of?
>
> Of being able to work with people, to help get people to try something together.

You're not one of them anymore. And I think I found that almost the hardest.

And you're not one of anything.

No.

That feeling's gone. That with teachers was gone and I didn't feel it was replaced at principal meetings.

No, no right.

And to stand up and say I had one terrible week. You'd get a look. That's not on the agenda.

(laughter)

And they don't want to know.

It's that, that loneliness.

Conversation October 14, 1992

Strength was also realized in our collaboration because its non-hierarchical structure removed the possibility of isolating one individual's personal experiences, her stories, through the separation imposed by artificially imposed hierarchial divisions. This connection between us was essential if we were going to talk with one another, respond to each other's stories. I know when I hesitantly shared my first story I felt that I was being heard by the others in the group and perhaps for the first time, really acknowledged it so I could begin to transform it.

Response was a connecting thread in our conversations. Response to a story shared creates a context for the story, acknowledging the importance of it in the past,

its purpose in the present and its possibilities for creating meaning in the future. It was the very power of the feeling of personal response which made it clear to me that this sense could not be abandoned in writing my research story.

> Something of the spirit of action of the participants...and researcher needs to find a place in the research story.
>
> Clandinin and Connelly (1991, p. 277)

I captured the spirit of our research in my letters. I believe the personal response allowed for the re-creation of the connections we had made with each other through our conversations. The absence of individual names in our conversations did come to symbolize the essence of our collaboration, our coming together, our relations, our sharing of past stories and the creation of new stories. I believe this action will also enable readers of my letters to hear their own stories in our words. "To raise questions about...their ways of knowing...question their own stories... (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991, p. 277)

> And to come to know that...
>
> ...we have listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs, so we have come more recently to notice not only the silence of women but the difficulty in hearing what they say when they speak.
>
> Gilligan (1982, p. 173)

Letters are written in the expectation that one will receive a response and possibly that an exchange, a sharing, will continue over time. I wrote letters to re-affirm the importance of relationships, and the on-going of receiving and giving of

response to one another. The research may be over but our conversations have not ended. They will continue or, as our conversations make clear, they must continue.

> Well for me this year, this is filling a void for me that I didn't even realize was really there and that's been wonderful.
>
> Conversation February 16, 1993

> End? This isn't really going to end, it can't. It won't, it started and there's no going back.
>
> Conversation March 17, 1993

And so we speak...softly at first...

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